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THE
HEIR OF SELWOOD:

OR,
THREE EPOCHS OF A LIFE.

BY THE AUTHORESS OF
"MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS," "MRS. ARMYTAGE,"
AND "STOKESHILL PLACE."

“LEON. How now, boy?

MAM. I am *like* you, they say.

LEON. Why, that's some comfort.”

WINTER'S TALE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE HEIR OF SELWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

Les choses que nous désirons vivement n'arrivent pas ;
ou, si elles arrivent, ce n'est ni dans le temps ni dans l'occa-
sion où elles nous auraient fait un extrême plaisir.

LA BRUYERE.

“ I HAVE good news for you, Sophy,” said Lady Emily to her pretty sister-in-law, after Lady Selsdon had received the salutations of the family party, and exhibited the charms of her baby to its admiring relatives. “ The Normans are arrived at Selwood, and will be here to-morrow.”

“ Lady Norman here to-morrow?—*That* is indeed a delightful surprise !” cried Lady Sels-

don. "How I long to see her boy, and shew her my little girl."

"Disgraceful!—to think of nothing but your rival nurseries in meeting a friend from whom you have been three years separated!" cried Lady Emily.

"What is this about Lady Norman?" inquired Lady Arthur D., who, among other connections of the Farleigh family, was staying in the house.

"That she is come back from Italy looking beautiful as ever, and joins our little circle to-morrow."

"I have seen or heard nothing of her since we parted four years ago at Paris in the midst of the Bonaparte panic," observed Lady Arthur. "She was a pretty, gentle creature. We used to like her amazingly; and it *was* amazingly, for we were as jealous as possible of her *succès*. The French swore that there was nothing like Lady Norman."

"There *is* nothing like her," said Lady Selsdon, with enthusiasm. "I never saw a person so devoid of selfishness or pretension."

“No merit of *hers*, my dear!”—observed Lady Arthur, with her usual jactance. “It all arises from living with that savage husband. Shew me the house in England wide enough to contain Sir Richard Norman’s selfishness and pretension, in company with those of any other person?—She has never had any room to think much of herself; ergo, her virtues are of her husband’s creation.”

“You speak of the Sir Richard of other days,” replied Lady Emily. “You won’t know your savage when you see him again. Bruin has learned to dance. I assure you he is come home as courteous as Chesterfield.”

“I must write word of that to Lady Dawlish.—Heavens! how Frank Villiers used to hate him in Paris!—His ungraciousness passed permission. Frank used to swear to the French that he was no Englishman, but that he had been American Chargé d’Affaires to the Court of Dublin.”

“I should not have fancied Sir Richard Norman a man to be trifled with,” said Lady Selsdon, calmly.

“Not if *aware* of the mystification. But you might as well expect the summit of Plinlimmon to know that boys are playing marbles at its base, as for Sir Richard to suspect that people are presuming to make game of him. In those days, he used to live three thousand miles above the level of the vulgar earth.”

“I prophesy that to-morrow you will pronounce him one of the most agreeable men upon the surface of it,” said her cousin.

“And what has wrought this wonderful transformation?—”

“Travel.—The polish which friction impresses on the rolling stone.—”

“More likely the birth of his son and heir,” said Mrs. Ravenscroft, who now entered the room after escorting her little grandchild to its quarters. “Sir Richard was soured by the prospect of seeing his entailed estates descend to a distant branch of the family.”

“Not exactly of *seeing* it,” said Lady Emily, a stickler for verbal accuracy.

“By the way,—yes;—I recollect now,” cried Lady Arthur; “Lady Catherine O’Flaherty

was stupid enough to marry the man who *was* to have been his heir. They made sure of coming into the property; when lo! one fine day Lady Dawlish brought news that there was a little Shiloh *en chemin*; and we had hysterics, and *crises de nerfs*, and Eau de Cologne for the rest of the day!—A fainting fit from Lady Catherine is no laughing matter:—Villiers' shoulder was sprained for a month afterwards!—He was obliged to go through a course of Russian baths.”

“Then pray do not risk bringing on a new attack by informing her that young Norman is the most promising little fellow I ever beheld,” said Lady Emily.

“*That* was another of poor Lady Catherine's vagaries!” observed Lady Arthur, gradually reviving her reminiscences of Paris. “Lady Catherine would have it that the Normans were going to impose a supposititious child upon the family. She insisted that Sir Richard and his wife lived on the most disunited terms; and so far moved the spirit of Lady Dawlish in compassion, that she dragged me down one day on

a voyage of discovery, to an old château the Normans inhabited near Charenton ; where, *par parenthèse*, we deserved to be detained on our road."

"And what did you find there?—"

"Nothing worth the journey. A stately old barrack of a house, with antechambers and *Salles des gardes*, to prove that the French nobility who now live *en polisson*, once lived *en prince* ; and a Caliban of a brother of Lady Norman's, who myladyed us all round, bit his bread while *we* bit our lips, and ate *omelette soufflée* with a sharp-pointed knife!—"

"The greater the merit of Lady Norman," interposed Lady Farleigh, angrily, "who, having such vulgar relations, is so perfectly well-bred. We are very fond of Lady Norman in this house. You recollect, Clara, that I gave her letters of introduction to you in Paris?—"

"Certainly—and I did them honour by presenting her to all my set. She would have got on wonderfully in society but for the little *cancons* set afloat by Lady Catherine respecting her parvenuism, and Sir Richard's *amourettes* with

some low wretch or other, one of Napoleon's Duchesses or Princesses, or something of that kind.—I never understood the story.

“No occasion, then, to renew the effort,” said Lady Farleigh, looking dignified and displeased at her niece's levity. “Nothing worthy attention is likely to proceed from Lady Catherine Norman.”

“Tell not that in Gath, my dear Madam,” exclaimed the giddy Lady Arthur. “*You* lawless people who leave London at midsummer, and know nothing of its thrones and dominions, have very little notion of Lady Catherine's present importance. Lady Catherine is great with the greatest;—has a Pythoness's tripod within the sanctuary of the Carlton Temple; and dispenses ribbons and pensions, by influencing some one who influences the other one. The French soldiers, you know, designate Napoleon “*l'autre*,”—a phrase we have adopted to specify our prince and master.”

“May I inquire, my dear, whom you mean by *we*?”—inquired Lady Farleigh, gravely.

“*Nous autres souverains*,—as a certain se-

rene highness said to the Emperor Alexander, one day at Escudiers. By *we*, I mean Almacks,—the world,—society,—the people one lives with !”

“Your indefinite pronoun, my dear Clara, can never be made to infer yourself and mamma,” observed Lady Emily ; “for *your* associates and hers are as diametrically opposite as black and white chessmen on a board.”

“Since you are so pragmatical, then, I mean Lady Dawlish’s set,”—persisted Lady Arthur.

“I guessed as much,” said Lady Farleigh. “Lady Dawlish’s set are, I admit, justified in worshipping Lady Catherine, for their idol was wrought with the labour of their hands.—But I hope you do not expect reasonable people to bow down to an *intrigante*, because the agent of the party in power ?—”

“I expect nothing just now, except those horrid men home from rabbit-shooting,” said Lady Arthur, weary of the discussion. “Lord Selsdon pretended to set off after them ; and instead of bringing them home, seems to have led them deeper into mischief. Now pray don’t

any of you take up his defence, or I shall begin to suspect they are off to Malvern or Cheltenham !”

Meanwhile, even though the hour had struck for her visit to Farleigh Castle, Matilda had attempted no explanation with her husband !—

Sir Richard was in the highest spirits. He found Selwood improved during his absence beyond his expectations. Mr. Maule having no further business in the metropolis, there was no fear of his renewing his annual visits to the Manor ; and as to Tom Cruttenden, they need take no further note of his existence. Selwood Cottage was almost as good as uninhabited, so long and frequent were Mrs. Ravenscroft’s visits to Tuxwell Park ; while the Abbé O’Donnel was safe for the remainder of his days in the Rue des Fossés, St. Victor. Sir Richard was thus secure from those domestic intrusions which he held in such abhorrence. He now lived as happily with Matilda as if the current of his true love had invariably run smooth as glass ; with daily increasing joy and pride in the promising little heir of Selwood. Not a shadow of care remained upon

his brow ; and Matilda trembled at the idea of arresting on his lips the rash invocation of “Soul, take thine ease,”—and substituting a solemn invitation to lasting remorse !—

Nevertheless, the effort must be made.—A glance at herself in the glass on the day appointed for her visit to Farleigh Castle, apprised her of the probability that some gratulatory remark from her old friends Lady Farleigh or Mrs. Ravenscroft might lead to discovery ; and arming herself with courage, she resolved to anticipate the startling announcement. She happened to enter the breakfast-room just as Walter was brandishing the bough of a beautiful exotic, which he had torn down in the conservatory.

“Sad complaints of this young gentleman from Anderson and the gardeners !”—observed Sir Richard, gazing fondly upon the boy and his prize, as if in admiration of such precocity of mischief.

“But why not choose your boughs in the shrubbery, Walter ?”—demanded Lady Norman. “You would find branches there to flog your

horse as well. Why prefer breaking those in the conservatory?—”

“ Because the servants ordered me *not*; and I don’t choose to be *ordered* by anybody but you or my papa!—”

“ There’s a brave spirit!”—cried Sir Richard Norman, patting his round white shoulder, as the child trotted past on his wooden nag.

“ Poor fellow!—he wants companions here,”—said Matilda, busying herself with the breakfast things, to conceal the changes of her countenance. “ But he may soon have one!”—

“ Not very soon. It will be some time before Selsdon’s children are old enough to amuse him.”

“ I did not allude to Lord Selsdon’s family,” added Matilda, with increasing confusion. “ I was anticipating the possibility of his having a brother of his own.”

“ God forbid!”—ejaculated Sir Richard, evidently without conjecturing the drift of her remarks.”

“ *Why* God forbid?”—resumed Lady Norman. “ Surely one hasty adoption need not so harden

our hearts as to render us insensible to the happiness of having children of our own ?—”

“ To our disappointment on that score,” said Sir Richard, still misapprehending her, “ I have so long made up my mind that it seems useless to recur to it.”

“ But the disappointment exists no longer,” said Matilda, firmly. “ In three months, I shall be a mother.”

Sir Richard Norman started from his chair ; and to Matilda’s heartfelt delight, she perceived that his first movement was a movement of joy.—An expression of rapturous self-gratulation brightened his features.—But, alas ! it vanished as it came,—vanished, to give place to a death-like paleness, and the gestures of a deep despair !—

“ I am punished as I deserve !”—cried he, after a heavy pause, during which tears gathered under his eyelids ;—“ since, instead of offering you at this moment my thanks and blessings, I am forced to sue for pardon and for pity !—Matilda, *can* you forgive me for having robbed your child of his birthright ?—Come hither,

boy!" cried he, suddenly seizing little Walter in the midst of his pastimes, and impelling him towards Lady Norman. "Down on your knees, and ask forgiveness with me of this angel!—"

"It is *not* an angel, it is my own dear mamma,"—cried the little fellow, throwing his arms round Matilda's neck, and imprinting an affectionate kiss upon her face that said more in his favour than worlds of studied supplications. "And mamma don't choose me to kneel for pardon to any but God Almighty. Do you?"—said he, addressing Matilda with another eloquent kiss.

"Never!" she replied. "But you must thank Him that you are going to have a little brother of your own, Walter.—Shall you not be fond of a little brother?—"

"That I shall,—if you don't love it better than you love *me*," cried the child.

"I promise you that I will not,"—replied Lady Norman, addressing Sir Richard through the medium of the child. "I will love no little boy better than *you*, Walter; because you were my first and dearest.—But you must be very kind

to your little brother when he comes, and protect him for my sake."

But it was useless to continue her reassurances to the agitated man. Unable to overcome his thick-coming emotions, he rose and quitted the room.

A few hours afterwards, and Matilda and her son were in the midst of the gay coterie at Farleigh Castle. Replying to the questions of a host of strangers with equal spirit and intelligence, young Norman was soon pronounced to be all that Lady Emily had described him. Yet these praises afforded little gratification to those they purported to please. Other feelings were burning on the cheek of Matilda; and already Sir Richard seemed to regard the little foundling with disgust. Lady Norman saw distinctly that her revelations had effected a total revolution in the feelings of her husband; and unluckily, his deportment was intimately regulated by his feelings. Instead of the joyous, cheery, courteous man announced by Lady Emily to Sophy and Lady Arthur, he had already relapsed into the moroseness of former years.—His mind was pre-

occupied.—He had not a word to offer in conversation.—No man recently arrived from the continent, after frequenting in its various countries, their most brilliant and distinguished society, ever found so little to say for the edification of a dinner table ;—and Lord Selsdon, whose talk was of

“ Guns, bugles, double-barrels, dogs, and thunder,”

was far more companionable. Even Lord Arthur D., whose colloquial efforts consisted in a smile occasionally interpolated into the discourse of strangers, or a yawn occasionally interpolated into that of his wife, was a less heavy weight on the circle than the man whose severe countenance and accusing silence appeared to tax them with frivolity.

Little did good Lord Farleigh dream, as he dilated to his long-absent neighbour upon the road-bills that had passed during his residence abroad to form highways where nothing was ever likely to pass in their thinly-populated district, how far away from Worcestershire were the thoughts of his companion !—Little did Lord

Selsdon imagine, when he cross-questioned him concerning the game laws, *bassets*, and *chevreuils* of France, what anguish of spirit prompted his vague and inaccurate replies !—Little did Lady Arthur D. conjecture that while he listened without reply to her intelligence that “ Lady Catherine Norman’s boy, having lost all his beauty, would bear no comparison with his little cousin Walter,” that the teeth of the smiling man were grinding with agony !—

Every ordinary word seemed to borrow significance in his ears. He kept fancying that those who addressed him had other meaning than they pretended ; that they discerned the plague-spot upon his soul, and derided his un-availing repentance !—

Already, some comments of the little boy had spread among Matilda’s friends the news of her position, and all were ready with congratulations. The elder matrons prognosticated that now she had commenced a family, she would have as many sons and daughters as Queen Hecuba ; while Lady Arthur incautiously exclaimed, and so loud as to be overheard by Sir

Richard Norman, "Well, I am glad you are likely to have more children. *That* puts an end at once to the scandalous rumours circulated by Lady Catherine Norman."

"What rumours?"—inquired Matilda, in a faltering voice, feeling it impossible to pass over the remark in presence of so many persons.

"That your eldest boy was a supposititious child, adopted to defraud her husband of the Selwood estates."

"Lady Catherine Norman is capable of saying anything gross and insulting!"—observed Lady Farleigh, provoked at Lady Arthur's indiscretion.

"Who knows, my dear Sophy,"—cried Lady Emily, anxious to laugh off the evident distress of Matilda,—"*perhaps* some malicious person will one day or other accuse *you* and Selsdon of having stolen little Louisa from the workhouse at Tuxwell, to supersede *me* in my claim to a portion of the Farleigh property.

"But my dearest Lady Norman, how pale you are growing," interrupted Lady Selsdon, fixing her eyes upon her friend. "I am sure

you are overfatigued ; you have not yet recovered the effort of your journey. Mamma, make room for Lady Norman beside that open window. The heat of the room, or the scent of that ahatura has overpowered her.—Sir Richard Norman, pray come this way a moment.—I fear Lady Norman is ill !—”

“ Matilda !” cried her husband, rushing forward to receive her into his arms.

But Matilda heard him not;—she had fallen into a state of insensibility.—

CHAPTER II.

In our pursuit of the things of this world, we prevent enjoyment by anticipation, and eat out the heart and sweetness of our pleasures by too much forethought of them.

TILLOTSON.

“MY dearest Matilda, this will never do!” cried Sir Richard, when at length he found himself alone with his wife. “Every moment, we are on the point of betraying ourselves. In taking the course I rashly adopted with regard to that unfortunate boy, I fancied I had anticipated all contingencies, and armed myself against their influence. I had not thought of the only one capable of enlisting our own feelings against us!—I had foreseen all else; but never dreamed

that the impulses of parental affection would defy all prudent self-government."

"They will *not*,—they *shall* not," replied Lady Norman. "From this day, you shall have nothing to complain of. I will command myself,—I will 'extinguish the very feelings *requiring* command.—Fear nothing.—My weakness this morning arose solely from fatigue."

"And from fatigue it will arise again. You have much to go through, my dearest wife. It is impossible for you to answer for yourself under such circumstances. At some moment of exhaustion or excitement, you will betray yourself and *me*."

"I will not!—Our sensations are more under our control than we choose to have it believed."

"At present you cannot decide on that point—"

"I can ;—for how could the business of the lower classes or the ceremonies of court proceed, were the sufferings incidental to my situation so overpowering?—"

"The sufferings of other women are not en-

hanced by wounded sensibility. Though you so generously spare me, imagine not that I do not appreciate all which, for the last six months, must have been passing in your mind.—We are miserable wretches, Matilda!—but, miserable as we are, there is no need to magnify the evil by surrendering ourselves to its influence without a struggle. We must be careful that the world judge us less severely than we have reason to judge ourselves. We must take heed of every word that falls from our lips, every glance that escapes our eyes. We must fly from Selwood, where we are objects of constant examination. We must take refuge in the throng of London.”

“Not *now*?—surely you will not require me to leave home again so soon?”—faltered Lady Norman, dreading the effort.

“I wish you to be confined in town. You will have better attendance,—you will be safe from espionage,—you will be secure from the intrusions of these damnable women!”

“But at such a time their presence would be a comfort rather than an intrusion,” pleaded Lady Norman.

“No comfort to *me*!”—replied her husband.

“Some unguarded expression would be sure to betray your inexperience.—They would be sure to discover—”

“As you please!”—interrupted Matilda, shrinking from even an allusion to her duplicity. “If you are of opinion that we shall be better in London, let us remove thither next week.”

And such was the intention she announced that evening, when questioned by her friends concerning her projects. As she had expected, all were loud in opposition. “London in September would be utterly deserted! Not a friend to cheer her, not an acquaintance to amuse! Lady Selsdon had done so well with country attendance, and country quiet! She would be so much better staying peaceably at Selwood Manor!”—Lady Farleigh promised that Sophy, who was to be her guest for the next six weeks, should constantly visit her friend; and Mrs. Ravenscroft assured her that she was going to spend the autumn at the cottage, and would watch over her as she had done over her daughter. But to all this, Matilda could only reply by admitting her anxiety to secure the attendance of London physicians.

“ You are grown a great coward all of a sudden, my dear !” exclaimed Lady Arthur. “ What makes you so much more frightened than you were three years ago ?—Have you anything on your conscience ?—I remember you persisted in being confined at that barrack of a château, with nothing but an old woman to attend you.”

“ My experience *then* has rendered me more cautious.”

“ Why *there* you had a very fair chance of being seized and shut up in La Force !—Yet not a step would you stir from the spot, even with the fear of Napoleon before your eyes.”

“ I assure you my fear of the Worcestershire faculty is far more considerable,” said Lady Norman, attempting a smile ; and this time her plea of defence was fortunate, for it drew down upon her a violent attack from Lady Farleigh and Mrs. Ravenscroft in favour of their pet apothecary, which diverted the attention of Lady Arthur from all recurrence to the past. When next she addressed Matilda, it was to describe the horrors awaiting her in a London September ; and the tirade was at length interrupted

by Mrs. Ravenscroft with a petition that little Walter, instead of being hurried into the unwholesome atmosphere of London at a period when his mother would be incapable of attending to him, might be left under her charge at Selwood Cottage.

On the day following, the ceremony of christening Lord Selsdon's lovely infant filled the castle with rejoicing. The grandfather and two grandmothers acted as sponsors; the old servants of the household were arrayed in smiles to welcome this budding of a new generation of the family; and the noble guests wore their white ribbons with good grace, and quaffed "victorious Burgundy" to the health of little Louisa Farleigh.

But there was something in the solemnity which sunk deep into the mind of Lady Norman,—something affecting in the family tenderness with which the little Christian was ushered into its new life, which strangely contrasted with the isolation awaiting her own. Little Walter's baptism had been hurried over, with the Guerchants only for respondents and witnesses; and

it happened that this was the first time she had been present at such a ceremony according to the ritual of the protestant church. The solemn words entered into her soul. She thought of her unborn child, and trembled lest for *it* she should never hear unfolded that sacrament of grace;—she thought of her unborn child, and felt conscious of her own unworthiness to enjoy a mother's triumph over her peril.

“ I shall die,—and I have deserved to die,” pondered Lady Norman,—glancing from the venerable countenance of Lord Farleigh's chaplain, who with such touching emotion was pronouncing the promises of the gospel in favour of the infant whose father he had also presented at the baptismal fount,—to the lace draperies of the little girl, arrayed in all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of her glorious christening robe. “ The holiest sanctity with which a woman is invested ought to be upon me now. The purest serenity of conscience ought to be mine, at a moment when other women set their house in order, lest in their anguish they should be snatched away. But I,—should I not survive

this event,—must go down to the grave in the commission of sin,—in the perpetration of a fraud such as, detected on the part of some poor uninstructed wretch, would consign him to a felon's chastisement. Were I of my husband's faith, I should not dare withhold this secret from the confessional; and my only impunity consists in the consistency of hypocrisy, which enables me to conceal it from the world!"

The sadness of Lady Norman's countenance amid the general rejoicing did not pass unnoticed. But at such a period, excuses were readily found for her low spirits; till her friends, compassionating what they supposed to be her forebodings, decided that with such evil presentiments she did right to remove to London for advice. It was a relief to all parties when Lady Norman returned to Selwood to prepare for her journey to town.

Matilda's distress was not, however, of a nature to be affected by change of scene. Home brought with it sorrows of its own. The very sight of Selwood was an accusation; for to Sir Richard's desire to estrange the property from

the Grove Park family, did she attribute the faulty deed so deeply repented. His attentions to her were now unceasing ; but whenever he drove her in his low phaeton through the woodlands by way of gentle exercise, she was forced to exert herself to talk, lest he should attribute her reverie to contemplation of the injury inflicted upon her child, by the alienation of those princely possessions. Even when he found her ruminating in her boudoir, tranquil for a time, and simply enjoying the luxury of that enchanting room, she would start up on his approach and affect to busy herself in some active pursuit, lest he should suppose her to be struggling with the suggestions of a jealous envy of the superseder of her child !—

Meanwhile, the time approached for their removal to town ; and Matilda had not yet hazarded a request that her family might be invited to the Manor previous to her departure. Her duty suggested that she ought to seek a blessing from the father from whom she had been three years separated ; while her inclinations prompted a renewal of intercourse with the

sister, whose letters, during her sojourn on the continent, announced that the intelligent girl had progressed into a high-minded woman. The ten years which divided Lady Norman at thirty-one from Mrs. Avesford, formed a very different barrier from that which at seventeen had divided Matilda Maule from little Lizzy; and she longed to embrace as a friend the sister she had quitted as a plaything.

But when the proposal was at length ventured, Sir Richard looked black and negative.

“It is surely not a moment for your introduction to strangers,” said he. “You cannot invite the Avesfords here without extending your hospitality to Mr. John Maule and his wife, with whom it appears your father is on a visit. This new brother and sister-in-law will be too much for you. They may be noisy, intrusive, disagreeable; and even were they all you can desire, they must still call upon you for exertions to which you are unequal.

“I confess I long to see my father and sister once again!”—remonstrated Matilda.

“If you could see them alone!—But the

flurry and bustle of a large family party at such a time !—”

“ There would be but five ; and I promise you not to over-exert myself.”

“ As you please !”—replied Norman, fractionally. “ Bring down the whole family in judgment upon me if you find it agreeable !—It only needs old Cruttenden and his protégé to make the plan perfect !”

“ I do not ask *that*,” sighed Matilda ; “ and were we desirous of their company, the pressure of their immense business prevents their quitting home.”

“ Since these people *are* to come,” resumed Sir Richard, “ the sooner the better.—If the hazard must be incurred, do not postpone it till, by hurrying the event, it ensures the further mischief of preventing our journey to London.”

But Matilda had already determined against bringing those who were likely to be ungraciously received, into contact with her husband ; and on the following day, instead of obeying his injunctions by despatching the letters of in-

visitation, she informed him that, on consideration, she thought it better to defer the promised party till her return from town. "Her father and sister would be better pleased to see the baby as well as herself."

"Mark the accomplishment of my prophecy!"—observed Sir Richard. "Already, you speak of this promised child as your own—your only;—already you seem to admit that Walter has no claims to their interest. It is this which made me dread an interview with your family. However well you may feign with indifferent persons, when once your heart is opened, dearest Matilda, you must inevitably betray yourself."

"My heart is not often opened," sighed Matilda, with irrepressible bitterness, as she reflected how cruelly her affectionate nature had been blighted by the limits assigned to her intercourse with her friends and kindred. "But no matter. I will strive to perfect myself in my painful lesson before I see my family. Later in the autumn, if I live, perhaps you will permit me to invite them."

The words "if I live" struck painfully upon

the ear of Norman. Conscious of apparent or involuntary harshness, but still without losing sight of the peremptory necessity for caution, he contented himself to pass for a monster rather than encourage an expansion of feeling on the part of Matilda, so fatal to the prospects of both.

“ I will write to Elizabeth from London, and surprise her with intelligence of my return to England and the approaching event,” murmured Lady Norman, when she found herself alone. “ As a married woman, she has probably become aware that a wife is not all-powerful in her husband’s establishment. May the discovery have brought with it events less direful than it has entailed on her unfortunate sister !—”

The day was now appointed for leaving Worcestershire. Matilda, on the eve of quitting Selwood, recalled to mind with a sigh the unforeseen incidents to which her last departure from home had been the precursor, and aggravated her regrets by evil inferences for the future. She paid a farewell visit to every fa-

vourite spot;—to a flower-garden buried in the woods, which Sophy Ravenscroft and herself had planned during Sir Richard's absence in France;—to a rustic fishing-house, where, during the two years succeeding her marriage, she had been accustomed to pass the summer evenings with her husband, enjoying the freshness of the surrounding waters. The damps of the spot *now* struck chill upon her heart!—Autumnal leaves were falling and disfiguring her forest garden. Everything around her partook of the gloomy influence of the hour. Even when, unknown to Norman, she betook herself to the village almshouses raised under her authority, to console her poor pensioners for her renewed absence by a secret benefaction, the terms of their blessings filled her mind with despondency. “God send you safe through it, my Lady!—Heaven prosper you, as it did before, and send you another noble boy to be a playmate for Master Norman!—”

It was on her return from this last expedition that Lady Norman, on her way through the park towards the house, found herself suddenly

intercepted by Ghita, whose services, at her own desire, had for some time past been transferred from herself to the little boy.

“ They have done their utmost, Madam,” said the woman, resolutely, “ to keep me from your presence. But the time draws near for your departure for town, and I must be heard.”

“ *Who* tries to keep you from my presence?” inquired Lady Norman, struck by the woman’s impetuosity.

“ That Mrs. Ghrimes, whom I followed into your service, and whom you have taken back again since you arrived here,” persisted Ghita. “ She seems afraid I should attempt again to supersede her. The fool is mistaken. Not for any sum of gold would I relinquish my attendance upon my boy.”

“ Then what have you to say to me, Ghita?” —demanded Lady Norman, becoming somewhat alarmed.

“ That you must take Master Walter and me to London with you.”

“ That cannot be. It is settled that you are both to remain here. You will take Master

Norman every day after breakfast to the lady who resides at the white house beyond the park gates, who will write me constantly accounts of him ; and you will give him all the indulgences to which he is accustomed."

" That will be many,—for you are a good woman to the child, and a better wife than he deserves, to the worst of husbands," retorted the wayward Italian. " But your instructions are superfluous ; — I must accompany you to town."

" You certainly will *not*," replied Matilda, irritated by the positive tone of her domestic. " My plans are otherwise arranged."

" Hearken !" resumed Ghita, drawing nearer to Lady Norman, as they skirted together a ragged thicket of hawthorns covering one of the slopes of the park ; " There is a subject to which, by your desire, I have been forbidden to allude ; but the interdiction holds good no longer when I know my boy to be in danger. I am not blind to all that is passing here. The collusion which, when childless, you granted to your husband, is now bitterly repented both by yourself and *him*. It

is not possible,—it is not in woman's nature,—that you should consent to disinherit your own legitimate son.”

“My own legitimate son is not yet in existence,” replied Matilda, almost dreading the sequel of Ghita's remonstrances, lest projects of deeper guilt than she dared contemplate, should be unfolded to her. “I may become the mother of a girl.”

“The chances are even;—and should an heir be born to Selwood, I am as convinced as that I have life, there would be evil dealing with my boy. Walter is to be left at this obscure place, and when he becomes burdensome, will be spirited away!—”

“No spot in England, however obscure, is beyond the vigilance of the law,” said Matilda, in a tremulous voice; “and how dare you suppose that Sir Richard Norman would be guilty of an atrocious action?—”

“I have never known him scrupulous,” said Ghita, with one of her sneers of former days. “A sin more or less costs him nothing!

lawless and godless,—a bad son to the church,—a traitor to all who love him !”

“ I cannot hear this,” exclaimed Matilda, trying to shake off her companion. “ Leave me and return to the house.”

“ I shall do neither one nor the other, Eccellenza, till you have granted my request,” said Ghita, folding her hands before her, and persisting in accompanying Lady Norman. “ In *you* I have some confidence. *You* are too good to allow an injury to be offered to my boy. I will answer for nothing that happens during your absence. I choose to accompany you to town.”

“ Do you pretend that Sir Richard has shewn less affection than myself towards that unfortunate child ?”—demanded Matilda, resentfully.

“ Far from it ; he has shewn *more*,—as in duty bound. But the change in his deportment since your situation declared itself, has not been lost upon me. He is growing peevish and irritable with Walter. What will he be

should a fine legitimate young son be born to his house?—I *know* him, and therefore dread to think of it !—”

“ I know him ; and am therefore certain that he will never do less than justice to the child we rashly adopted,” said Matilda, with dignity.

“ Prove your good intentions then, honoured lady, by permitting us to accompany you on your journey !” cried Ghita, laying a detaining hand upon her dress. “ If no evil be intended, the petition is a slight one.—Keep us in your sight ! Do not banish us from your protection !—Consider how that little one loves you.—Your own will not love you better !—Let him not be cast out to perish like the son of the bondwoman !—”

“ Is he your own, Ghita,” demanded Matilda, on the rash impulse of the moment, “ that you plead thus warmly ?—”

“ *Mine*?—The mercy of heaven forbid !” replied the Italian. “ Rather die than call my own the son of such a father !—But your ladyship must recollect,” said the woman, checking herself as she noticed the sudden start given by

Matilda, "that I was in personal attendance upon you the day Walter was brought to St. Sylvain,—and that I *cannot* be more his mother than yourself."

"I remember!"—faltered Lady Norman, grieved that such memories should be recalled to her at such a moment.

"You grant my request then?"—demanded Ghita, encouraged by her mistress's subdued tone.

"Sir Richard must determine ;—the decision rests not with myself.—"

"Every decision *would* rest with yourself had you energy to support your rights!"—cried the Italian. "You allow this man to crush your spirit into nothingness,—to drag you when and whither he pleases,—to exile you from your friends and country, in order to force upon your adoption a ——"

"Ghita!—what means this violence?"—demanded the voice of some person overtaking them. And in a moment, the arm of the Italian was seized, and Matilda found Sir Richard by her side.

“Ghita is requesting me to take our little boy with us to London,” said Lady Norman, dreading the excess to which he might be provoked by her companion. “She fancies Walter will fret after me, if left alone at Selwood.”

“He will not be alone.—Mrs. Ravenscroft has undertaken the charge of him.—”

“No person shall have the charge of him but *me* !”—cried Ghita, unabashed ; “and once for all, I *will* not remain here at the *château* !—”

“You pretend to disobey my commands ?”—cried Norman, furiously.

“I do !—and would that I had disobeyed them earlier !—”

“Then quit the *château*, and for ever !” cried the angry man, unused to find his authority opposed.

“Instantly, — if you require it !” replied Margherita, resuming the scornful air so offensive of old to Lady Norman. “It is not in *your* service, God knows, that I have the slightest inclination to remain !—But, before I go, I feel it my duty to declare to this angel, for the sake of my unfortunate little charge—”

“ You *dare* ? ”—vociferated Sir Richard, seizing her by the arm, and hurling her to some paces distance.

“ I *dare* ! ”—persisted Margherita, roused rather than intimidated by his violence.

“ Silence ! ”—cried Lady Norman,—interposing with a degree of energy so unusual to her as to impose silence for a moment upon both parties. “ I choose to know nothing which Sir Richard desires should remain a secret !—”

“ Dupe that you are,—you deserve your fate ! ” ejaculated the impetuous Italian. Then, as if suddenly recollecting that she was injuring the cause of her nursling, she flung herself at the feet of Matilda, exclaiming—“ Pardon, pardon, for the poor hot-headed Istrian,—who knows not how to control her words when her heart’s blood is stirred up !—I have a deeper stake in all this, lady, than you know of !—Take pity on me and the boy, and let us accompany you to London !—”

“ Be it so,” replied Lady Norman, influenced by some inexplicable instinct. “ You *shall* attend me to London ; but it is on condi-

tion, Ghita, that this scene is never to be renewed, and that you do not attempt to disturb my tranquillity by obscure hints, unavailing to any honourable purpose."

"I promise!"—replied the woman, taking Matilda's hand and pressing it to her lips.

"Swear it!"—cried Sir Richard.

"Oaths are for such as *you!*" cried the woman, extricating herself from the grasp he had laid upon her shoulder. "*She* would not believe me the more for that without which *you* do not believe me at all.—But you may trust me.—For *her* sake, I shall be silent."

Luckily for all parties they had now emerged from the shrubbery and attained the open lawn; for Matilda, even with the assistance of Sir Richard's arm, was scarcely able to reach the house. As they crossed the vestibule, little Walter came bounding towards them; and for the first time, Sir Richard thrust him harshly aside and forbade him to follow them into the library, where he proceeded to deposit the trembling Matilda upon the sofa;—thus unconsciously justifying in her eyes the mysterious

accusations of the nurse. In the course of the evening, therefore, she despatched a note of thanks and apology to Mrs. Ravenscroft, acquainting her with their change of plans; and on the following day, persisted in taking the ill-fated boy with her in the carriage, on her first day's journey towards town.

CHAPTER III.

The storms of life fly over the heads of the middle class, and break upon towering mountains and lofty cedars. They have got no ill-got places to lose. They are neither libelled nor undermined ; but without invading any man's right, sit safe and warm in a moderate fortune of their own.—DR. SOUTH.

LONDON in September has been too often described as the type of everything desolate and dull,—savouring of mellow apples, and encumbered with bricklayers' ladders ; — the pavement damp,—the air stagnant,—the atmosphere obscured by fogs ;—neither cheered out of doors by the freshness of the weather, nor indoors by the cheeriness of winter pastimes.

Europe scarcely produces, in fact, a city

more disagreeable than London, between August and the New-year; and the fact is nowhere more apparent than in its ultra-fashionable quarters. Throughout Hill Street, where a house was engaged for the Normans, not a window but was closely shuttered; nor a door but was sealed as hermetically as a mausoleum. In that part of the town which is said to contain only a population of lords and lackeys, neither lord nor lackey was perceptible: the standard footman with his powdered head, and the standard Marquis with his empty head, being alike eclipsed in provincial seclusion.

Sir Richard's knock, on his daily return home to dinner, sounded echoingly and hollowly along the empty street; even the infirm old charwomen left in charge of the opposite houses (the most cheerful-looking of which had its windows left open to disclose vast placards of "To let, unfurnished"—scarcely visible through the dim and weather-stained glass,) being too lazy to look out and ascertain the cause of so unusual a disturbance. Nor was his coming a source of much enlivenment to Matilda. He had nothing

to relate,—had seen and heard nothing, except the coughs of starving hackney-coaches stationary on their stands; or a few cabriolets scudding along St. James's Street, with their freight of dandies run to seed,—a miserable species, indigenous in the atmosphere of the clubs, and visible above the horizon only between the hours of four post meridian and four post midnight. But with these, the aborigines of May Fair, and Bush Rangers of Hyde Park, Sir Richard had long abjured connection. He now “wandered lonely as a cloud” through the deserted metropolis; and the fussy, fastidious dame, who was to officiate as Matilda's nurse, recommended by the physician recommended by Lady Farleigh, was heard to pronounce that the usual ceremony of tying up the knocker with a kid-glove might certainly be dispensed with, in that most deserted house of that most deserted metropolis.

All this did not tend to raise the spirits of Lady Norman. The exclusivism of the waiting-gentlewoman, accustomed only to attend upon

exclusives, revolted her; Mrs. Smith being evidently of opinion that a lady not in Lady Dawlish's set, who had never been to Almacks, and was not even presented, was a patient far below her cure; till at length Matilda reverted with regret to the good-humoured familiarity of Madame Gervais, so much more in character with the duties of her calling.

But the recollection of Madame Gervais brought with it a host of painful recollections!—St. Sylvain with its accusing reminiscences rose before her. She seemed to hear the old French-woman's hearty laugh, exulting whenever she effected some manoeuvre to baffle the curiosity of the servants; and to see the cordial looks with which, every morning, she brought the infant to be kissed and admired after the completion of its toilet; saying, in a tone not to be resisted, "I must have an embrace for my poor little boy!—If not his mother, *ma belle dame*, remember you have undertaken to be his *friend*."

"*Who* will be the friend of *my* child!"—thought Matilda, "if this business should end

unfavourably !—I have cultivated the affections of none, and by none shall I be remembered with affection !—”

It was in vain that Sir Richard Norman devoted his time and eloquence to dispel her despondency. It was useless to propose rides and walks, when all that greeted without was but a repetition of the monotonous scene within. It was useless to propose new publications or works of fiction for the amusement of a person whose thoughts were thus sickened with care.

How different had been the impressions of Lady Norman, could she have emerged from the stagnant oppression of the abandoned city, for a glimpse of the cheerful, happy home of the Avesfords. Fern Hill, in grandeur so many degrees beneath the scale of Selwood Manor, was a gay little spot,—a compact, commodious house, standing in a paddock of about a hundred acres in extent, deriving its chief interest from an extensive prospect of the banks of the Mersey, and a view of the Irish Channel. The house and establishment, of moderate extent, were in a progressive state. The prudent mer-

chant who allowed himself to spend there only two days of the week with occasional visits during the other five, constantly brought with him some addition to the comforts or beautifications of the house. There was movement and expectation about Fern Hill. There was an adjoining farm, to the purchase of which young Avesford looked confidently forward ; and he had promised saddle-horses to his wife for the following year. He was, in truth, a sensible, enterprising, warm-hearted fellow ; delighted to afford a happy home to the old age of his father-in-law, and by no means likely to become a martyr to the domestic tyranny of Tom Crutenden. The friend of the family was invited to Fern Hill whenever it suited him to absent himself from the factory ; but it was clear, from the first visit, that he was to come as a guest, and not as a master. Avesford would not even allow Elizabeth's father to be bullied with impunity in his presence.

Though still a stranger to the Normans, he had been tolerably enlightened by his wife as to their position with regard to the family. He

saw that one of Maule's handsome daughters, having married above her station, had been constrained by a proud, egoistical husband to renounce all intimate connection with home; and foresaw that the long absence of the Selwood family on the continent, and the marriage of John Maule and Elizabeth in the interim, would complete their alienation. For his own part he cared very little even to make their acquaintance; but the fond leaning of his wife towards her gentle sister, whom Tom Cruttenden persisted in asserting to be the most ill-used and unhappy of women, prevented his admitting, in the presence of Elizabeth, his indifference to the fate of Matilda.

One bright September morning Avesford made his appearance betimes at Fern Hill, to enjoy a day's sport in some neighbouring preserves, and do honour to a visit from Cruttenden, who was come to spend a few days with his old partner. He found the party assembled at breakfast in a cheerful, bay-windowed room commanding a view of the sea, discussing the proba-

bility of the arrival of John Maule and his wife, who were to visit them in the course of the autumn.

“Maule, my man, set your chair a little way round the corner, and make room for Avesford by his wife,” cried Tom Cruttenden, doing the honours to his host the moment he entered the room. “You need not put in more tea, Betsy,—’tis strong as poison already!—I’m sorry to say it, my dear, but you never had a notion of making tea.—Few women have.—Women make one wait for the tea till it’s cold, and bread and butter till it’s hot. Avesford, when you’ve done whispering there, I’ll thank you for the newspapers.—I suppose you’ve been clever enough to bring them in your pocket?—”

“I mean to be clever enough to keep them there,” replied Avesford, continuing his breakfast. “Elizabeth does not allow reading at table.”

“The deuce she don’t!—How long has Betsy begun to lay down the law?”

“Ever since she became my wife,” replied Avesford, laughing.

“ If she means her bad tea to go down without help of the morning papers, I can tell her she’s mistaken !”—cried old Crutt, with rising choler.

“ Surely the news, at this season of the year, will keep till we rise from table ?”—observed Maule, gaining courage from his son-in-law’s valour to oppose his petulant partner. Neither parliament nor the courts of law are sitting !—”

“ What can you possibly expect to find in the papers ?” demanded Avesford, provokingly.

“ If I knew beforehand, I should have no call to read them !”—cried Cruttenden, snappishly. “ Maybe the announcement of a hurricane at St. Kitt’s;—or maybe a fire in the docks, to take the shine out of the house of Avesford and Son.”

“ Many thanks !”—replied the young merchant, laughing heartily at the ready malice of the retort. “ But my father’s estates at Basse-terre, and my own warehouses, are all amply insured. Our real estates defy the terrors of the three other elements.—Try again !—”

“ Perhaps I may be looking out for the death

of the Woldham parson, the reversion of whose living I purchased last spring."

"Nothing will suit your taste, in fact, but a casualty!" cried Avesford.—"But be not uneasy about Woldham!—The climate is the healthiest in Yorkshire.—The last incumbent lived to be ninety, and his predecessor was a centenarian."

"A sectarian, I suppose you mean," cried Crutt, chuckling at the idea that he was setting his adversary right.—"Well! if the old gentleman at Woldham holds on, John must rest contented with his curacy.—It makes no odds to *me*.—"

As this was the first intimation offered to the family by Tom Cruttenden, who, like Friport in Voltaire's play, "*savait donner, mais ne savait pas vivre*," of his intended gift to young Maule of a living of twelve hundred a year, it was not, of course, to be passed over without acknowledgments from the father and sister; which Tom interrupted by exclaiming, "A truce to your humbugging,—and just trouble that young fellow to hand me over the newspapers!—"

"I am afraid I must make an exception in your favour," said Avesford, who was fond of

trifling with the petulance of the old bachelor. "But if you find anything extraordinary in the great letters, favour us with the communication in token of gratitude."

"Great letters, forsooth!"—ejaculated Tom, tearing open the envelopes of the morning papers. "You don't think me ass enough, at my time of life, to read the *opinions* of a greater ass than myself, when I have facts lying before me?—The great letters are intended for old women and young children, and I've ceased to be one, and not begun to be the other.—Bless my stars!"—cried he, interrupting himself as he glanced along the columns,—“I hadn't the least notion of such a thing!—”

“Of what?”—demanded his three auditors, with some interest.

“What can it signify to *you*?”—cried Crutenden, spitefully. “Neither parliament nor the law courts are sitting, you know!”

“Have you found tidings of a fire,—or a hurricane,—or something else equally agreeable?”—exclaimed Avesford.—

“What will you give me for my news?”—demanded the old gentleman of Elizabeth.

“A cup of tea rather less strong than poison.”

“Worth more than *that*, Madam Betsy!—Bid again!—”

“She will grant you her forgiveness for daring to trifle with her curiosity,” observed Avesford, “which, in my opinion, is more than you deserve.”

“The deuce it is!”—said Cruttenden, putting the paper into his pocket. “Then she may wait my pleasure to learn what I was going to tell her about poor Matty.”

“About *Matilda*?”—exclaimed Mr. Maule and his daughter.

“Ay,—about Matty,—and another person belonging to her;—not her fine parchment-and-pedigree jesuit of a husband though.”

“Her child, then!—I trust to Heaven no evil has happened to her little son!”—cried the warm-hearted Mrs. Avesford.

“That’s more than she deserves at your

hands," sneered old Tom. "'Twill be a plaguy long time before Matty trusts to Heaven to bestow its succour upon *you* !—"

"My sister's thoughts towards her family are kinder, Mr. Cruttenden, than you give her credit for," said Elizabeth, warmly. "Our intercourse has only been checked by the mistrust with which, early in her marriage, you saw fit to inspire my father."

"And I see fit still.—Avesford has *me* to thank that he does not find you telling your beads every morning, instead of reading the chapters for the day."

"But about Matilda?"—cried Elizabeth, impatiently.

"Oh, if my lady is the affectionate sister you describe, no doubt you will have a letter to inform you of it by the post."

But he was deprived of the delight of inflicting further torment on Mrs. Avesford. Her husband, coming adroitly behind the old gentleman while engaged in squabbling, extracted the paper from his pocket, and read aloud—"On the 15th

inst., in Hill Street, Berkeley Square, the lady of Sir Richard Norman, Bart., of a daughter."

"Matilda in England!—Matilda in London!—Matilda the mother of a little girl!"—burst simultaneously from the lips of her father and Mrs. Avesford.

"It strikes me now," interrupted Cruttenden, not deigning to notice the manœuvre practised on him by Avesford,—“that were Matty anything worth speaking of, either as daughter or sister, it wouldn't be from the public papers you had to learn her return to her native country, after so many years' absence!”

"Her letters may have miscarried," said Mrs. Avesford, in a mortified voice.

"Letters rarely miscarry," observed her husband, gravely; "*never*, unless when they are known to contain something to repay the hazard of abstraction."

"When did you hear from her last?"—demanded Cruttenden, provokingly.

"My father received the last letter in June or July."

“ In *May*,” again observed Mr. Avesford.
“ It was before we came hither for the summer.”

“ And didn’t she tell you there was a chance of another olive-branch,—or yew-branch I should be apt to call it, off such a parent stock as that of the Normans.”

“ She made no allusion to the subject,”—observed old Maule, who had been absorbed in reflection.

“ Why, she must have been pretty sure of it four months ago—eh?—I suppose Matty has learnt from her husband the art of making mysteries about nothing ; and I wish that may be the worst lesson the fellow has taught her.—When young Crutt was in town last spring, he’d a deal of talk about Sir Richard with a rich cousin of his, a city banker ; and not knowing Crutt’s relationship to Matty, ’twas wonderful what lengths the old gentleman went in speaking of the Baronet.”

“ That must be the father of our neighbour Lady Audley,” observed Elizabeth, half aside to her husband. “ I had no idea she was so nearly connected with my brother-in-law.”

“ Never call him brother-in-law, Betsy, if

you've the slightest respect for yourself!"—exclaimed Cruttenden, "for you know he looks on the whole family as so much dirt, and all but turned young Crutt out of his house, when he took the trouble of going over to see his sister in France."

"About Sir Richard's respect or regard, I trust my wife is too wise to trouble herself," said young Avesford, calmly. "But I confess I feel mortified for and with her, that her sister should be settled in London without giving any intimation of her return to England. We shall live very happily without Lady Norman, and, I trust, Lady Norman will live very happily without *us*; but I know that in my own family, in my own humble sphere of society, such conduct would be thought unfeeling and preposterous."

"That's because you're an uncivilized savage!" cried Cruttenden, with one of his driest sneers. "Nothing but savages are influenced now-a-days by the instincts of nature. How would the fashionable world get on so smoothly as it does, if people were to encumber themselves with the old fashioned lumber and baggage of

feelings and affections?—Light weight and no luggage allowed is your only go!—I'll be bound Matty has forgotten in what county she was born, and in another year or two will open her eyes languidly, and wonder whether she ever had a father."

All were silent;—Elizabeth and old Maule from painful emotion,—and Avesford from feeling that there was more reason in old Crutten-den's diatribe than usually graced his harangues.

But though indignant against the coldness of "Lady Norman," a thousand kind feelings towards "Matty" gradually rose in the minds of these worthy people, when they pictured her as the happy mother of a young family. Elizabeth sometimes thought her sister not sufficiently circumstantial in her letters touching the beauty and qualities of her little son, whom they had accidentally heard described by others as one of the handsomest children in existence. But she felt sure that a little girl would fill up the measure of Matilda's affections,—a little girl, fair and gentle as herself,—a little girl, such as Mrs. Avesford often dreamed of calling her own.

She began to conjecture by what name the little stranger would be distinguished. Would it be called Matilda after its mother, or Eliza-beth after its grandmother and aunt?—

“My dear, good woman!” cried old Tom, tapping her on the shoulder; “you might as well expect Matty to call it Brummagemina at once!—Take my word for’t, ’twill be Alicia, or Mildred, or Blanche, or some other fine name connected with the tombstones in Selwood church. The bantling is not to be brought up a papist by that old sneak of a priest,—that’s one comfort,—or as sure as we’re all alive, the word mother would have been struck out of the fifth commandment, when little Miss came to be taught the way of making her days long in the land.”

Notwithstanding the unsatisfactory mode in which the news of her sister’s return had reached Fern Hill, Mrs. Avesford was too kind-hearted to demur about offering her good wishes on the occasion. She wrote simply and affectionately,—she could write in no other guise,—stating how dearly she longed to hold

her sister and her sister's children in her arms ; and thanking Heaven that, on this occasion, the babe had seen the light in the land of its fathers. She asked a thousand questions concerning her little niece, which she had never been tempted to inquire concerning her little nephew ; whether fair or dark,—blue-eyed or brown,—whether displaying any resemblance to its mother or to the young sister they had lost, who had been for many years the ailing nursling of Elizabeth.

Little did Mrs. Avesford imagine, as she penned these womanly queries, which would have called down thunders of scorn from old Cruttenden, what tears of delight they were to draw from the eyes of Matilda!—Lady Norman felt as if her lovely infant had found a friend ; as if, though so scandalously unwelcome to its parents, the little creature was safe in the affections of the kind and the worthy. Holding it more closely to her bosom, she breathed her thanks to the Almighty that, among her own kindred, and in her father's house, its coming had been hailed as a blessing !—She even took courage to entreat Sir Richard's permission that

her sister might be its second godmother, Lord and Lady Selsdon having already petitioned to be two of the sponsors; and the careless tone in which he gave his assent,—so different from that in which he treated the slightest matters relating to his adopted child,—convinced her that the little girl,—the little protestant,—would claim a small share in his affections.

Matilda had been spared at least the spectacle of her husband's agony while uncertain respecting the sex of the child. Her sufferings had been protracted; but great as they were, and sincere as was his sympathy, not even the idea of her danger had obliterated one moment from his mind the predominant fear that a legitimate son would be born to shake the firmness of Matilda. Ghita, the only person by whom his terrors were witnessed, was not of a temper to reveal to Lady Norman the pitiable state in which, on the staircase leading to the chamber of his wife, he had awaited information of the birth of his child; or the frenzy of delight with which, on hearing it announced as a girl, he had rushed into the room where Walter was playing,

snatched him to his bosom, and covered him with countless kisses ! All this excitement had subsided before he ventured into the presence of his wife. It was with leaden eye and staid deportment that he accosted *her*, and imprinted his chilling kiss of welcome upon the forehead of his babe !—

Though stung to the soul by his apparent indifference, it was, as usual, *herself* that Matilda accused as chiefly accountable for his fault. Had not an alien been intruded by her consent into the sanctities of his home, how differently would this child of theirs have been regarded by its father !—If Walter had superseded her baby by the influence of his attractions and endearments, who but herself was to blame ?—It was she who had introduced a rival under its father's roof ; it was she who had diminished its share of parental tenderness and worldly prosperity, by the substitution of an heir to Selwood !—

CHAPTER IV.

A guilty conscience is as a whirlpool ; drawing in all to itself which would otherwise pass by.

FULLER.

ABSORBED in delights so new and exquisite as those extracted by a young mother from every utterance and feature of her firstborn babe, Lady Norman, during the weeks following its arrival, took little heed of what was passing in the house. Mrs. Ghrimes, the permanent woman of the bed-chamber, and Mrs. Smith, the temporary, fought out their animosities unobstructed ; hinting of each other a thousand crimes and misdemeanors, without so much as disturbing the attention of Ma-

tilda. Heart and soul were devoted to that little helpless, unmeaning, moaning thing, which exceeded in *her* estimation of human importance a college of Cardinals, or a diet of the empire.

Sir Richard, she knew, passed his mornings at his club. He was beginning, *faute de mieux* (though a better may be so easily found), to interest himself anew in politics. The prospects of emancipation were becoming daily more distinct. Great names were now enlisted in the cause; and on *them* great hopes were founded. Poor little Walter could no longer command an auditor for his simple narratives when he came home from his daily walk in the deserted park, or the cheerless limitation of Berkeley Square. In vain did he tell of horses and chariots,—gods, men, and columns,—no one cared to hear of his adventures. Even his account of a pretty lady, (“almost as pretty as mamma, only not so good-natured-looking,”) by whom he was noticed and fondled, failed to draw down upon Ghita the usual admonition addressed on

such occasions by English ladyships to English menials, "Remember, you are on no account to suffer strangers to speak to the children." Matilda was in fact scarcely conscious of the child's presence in her room, when he returned from his excursions; and Sir Richard was content to see him well and happy, without inquiring upon what fair strangers the boy's caresses were bestowed.

At length, the day approached for the dismissal of Lady Norman's professional attendants. The bloom of health was once more upon her cheek; and when rendering up her thanks for her recovery, she had the satisfaction of devoting her little girl to the protestant faith, under the auspicious name of "Constance." A day at a fortnight's distance was fixed for the return of the family to Selwood; and by Sir Richard's permission, invitations were already despatched to her friends in Lancashire and Yorkshire, to meet them at the Manor shortly before Christmas, for the celebration of the christening.

All that remained for Matilda was to regain strength as rapidly as possible; and to effect this, she was advised to try gentle exercise, in addition to her daily airings.

“ You must come with me, dearest mamma, into the square, and bring my little sister with you, and *I* will take care of you both,” was Walter’s prompt invitation, on hearing the prescription.—“ You can lean on my arm you know, when you are tired; and I will introduce you to my beautiful lady.—”

“ What beautiful lady, Sir ?”—demanded Sir Richard, who happened to be present.

“ A lady who gives me fruit and flowers, and inquires of me about you and mamma.”

“ Of whom is he speaking ?”—resumed Norman, addressing Matilda.

“ Some lady fond of children who has been captivated by his beauty in Berkeley Square. I was not aware that any person in this neighbourhood was left in town.”

“ It is very wrong of Ghita to let the child make promiscuous acquaintances,” cried Sir

Richard, angrily. "How do we know whom this woman may be?"

"At *his* age, surely, it does not much signify. But Ghita, who is not without tact, says that Walter's friend is a lady *très distinguée* in her appearance."

"So are many whom I should be sorry to see bestowing caresses on my child."

"Walter's *prôneuse* is usually accompanied by one or two gentlemen perfectly *comme il faut*; and has a handsome carriage waiting for her at the gate."

"She sometimes asks me to take a drive with her," cried Walter. "But Ghita would never let me go."

"Ghita is perfectly right.—Pray ascertain who it is," continued Norman, addressing his wife, "the first time you accompany the children to the square."

"I know so few people by sight, that I shall be as inconclusive in my account as Walter."

"Ah! but you *do* know *this* lady," cried the child, "for she talks about you and papa, as if

she had very, *very* often seen you ; and asks me so many droll questions about are you fond of each other,—and is my papa glad to have my little sister,—and does he take more notice of it than of me.—”

“ This appears to be a very inquisitive, officious person !”—cried Sir Richard. “ I do not half like his account of her.”

And in the sequel, still less did he like the actuality ; for, on Walter being accompanied by Matilda into the square, the little boy’s anonymous patroness proved to be neither more nor less than Lady Catherine Norman.

Vexed at this accidental encounter, Sir Richard attributed the most alarming importance to the approaches and inquiries of Giles Norman’s wife. Secluded from the coteries of the fashionable world, he was not yet aware that Lady Catherine’s existence *as* Giles Norman’s wife, was merely supplementary to her importance as one of the Hydra heads of the ascendant Tory party ; one of those weak, noisy heads, called *mauvaises têtes*, which con-

trive to render themselves more prominent and evidential than heads of higher capacity.

Lady Catherine, from a person had become a personage. In that frippery epoch of "gilt and gaud," a handsome chattering woman, of high descent, qualified by nature and art to look down and talk down the efforts of the untitled and uninitiated, had wonderful scope for the exercise of her insolent egotism. The religious disabilities of Mr. Norman prevented his profiting by her influence so far as to assume a post in the administration. There was no pretext for insinuating his name into the red-book, or her ladyship's into the pension-list. But though unable to shine as more than one of the golden tassels on the fringe of the administration, she kept a house of call for Downing-street dangles out of employ; and by the blaze of her beauty and high Toryism, threw into eclipse the insignificance of her Roman-catholic husband. As it was impossible to make something of him, she made him nothing. Insignificant indeed,—insignificant in mind and purposes,—Giles Nor-

man rejoiced in a position which a man of spirit and honour would have rebutted as injurious. Lady Catherine's levities of conduct were grave and methodical, but they were not the less defamatory in the estimation of right-thinking and right-feeling persons ;—and the diminutive pomposity with which Norman offered his protection, and really advanced the interests of his *protégés*, convinced the world that he could see no shame in the injury derived from so high and profitable a source.

Success, however, was on their side ; and the world, as usual, sided with “ *les gros bataillons*.” Supported by “ Lady Dawlish's set,” by high-birth, beauty, and self-sufficiency, Lady Catherine brandished her *oriflamme*, and, like the maid of Orleans, was pronounced to be a holy woman, so long as she remained triumphant. *Who*, in fact, could presume to cast a stone at her, among those whose missiles of diamonds and rubies are as fatal as paving-stones ;—but who are so cunningly cautious in their selection of those against whom they arm their slings ?—Lady Catherine was an ornament to their parties,—

Lady Catherine was an enhancement to their dinners,—Lady Catherine could make cornets of their sons, and niche their grandmothers into the pension-list,—provide for their superannuated butlers, and sport with prebendal stalls as lightly as with stalls at the opera. Under *her* auspices, the whispering school of Madame de Montrond was introduced into the glittering saloons of Carlton House; and while she occupied some remote divan at the Pavilion, discussing with Princess Wittagemot the becomingness of a new turban or curl of an ostrich-feather, the dupes of the *beau monde* stood aloof and respected the coalition, believing it to refer to protocols and preliminaries of peace. There was a tone of derision about Lady Catherine, sharpened and polished by a course of Parisian courtiership and diplomacy, which it was not easy to connect with the real triviality of her capacities.

“The world,” as in Shakspeare’s time, “is still deceived with ornament,” and runs headlong to surrender itself to any gallant band of marauders that advances with plumes waving, colours

flying, and the haha of the trumpet; and so great is the influence of consistency and perseverance of purpose in giving weight to a party, that people were, at that period, blinded into respect for a gang whose unanimity consisted in a general thirst for plunder,—whose moral principle was the promotion of the greatest happiness of the smallest number,—and whose political principle, “let us maintain the throne, that the throne may maintain *us*!”—Yet so neat was the workmanship of their cabinets,—so compact the organization of their party,—so close and unattacked its homogeneity, that, lost in admiration of the ingenuity of the wasp’s nest, the spectators overlooked the uselessness and obnoxiousness of the insects by which it had been created.

Of the temple of conservatism, Lady Catherine was the high priestess;—concocting her auguries with that sacred bird—the golden-egg-laying goose—the people of unreformed England. But upon Sir Richard Norman, her oracular influence was lost. *He* saw in her only the woman whose children had suffered wrong by his imposture, and who was probably intent upon discovering

and exposing its extent. *He* believed her to be a model of maternal tenderness. He dreamed not that since the child, formerly so pampered with indulgences, had forfeited its chance of heirship to Selwood Manor, Lady Catherine's cupidity and ambition had swerved from the boy to concentrate themselves exclusively in political intrigue; Master Norman the elder being consigned, *pro tempore*, to oblivion, in one of those Brighton preparatory schools of dandyism, whose birch and primers are gilt, and whose Holland pinafores, distinguished by coronets with a difference—ducal, marquessatorial, and so forth. Meanwhile, scarcely had Matilda's vexation subsided at the discovery of Lady Catherine's advances, when she received a note from Lady Dawlish, saying that, being in town for a day or two, on her way from Walmer Castle to her seat in the north, she hoped Sir Richard and Lady Norman would do her the charity to dine with her the following day, to meet a few of the only race of people then extant in London,—ministers and guardsmen.

“ I have written a civil answer, declining of

course the invitation," observed Matilda to her husband, while Sir Richard glanced over the note, on his return soon afterwards from his club.

"*Declining* it!—Why the deuce did you not consult *me*?"

"I fancied that, disliking as you do Lady Dawlish's set, the last thing you could desire would be to dine in their company."

"Is it necessary to entertain a profound esteem for those with whom one occasionally exchanges cutlets and claret?"—inquired Norman, with a smile. "We have been leading a dull life lately, and it would have suited me very well to go."

"Then you have still the opportunity," said Matilda; "my note is not yet despatched, and can be written again."

And instead of refusing, (as she had anticipated he would do, when he found the power of option remained,) Sir Richard accepted her proposal to write a new answer to Lady Dawlish, adding, to her further amazement, "We have lived too much out of society, my dear Matilda, since our marriage. I conceive it an

injury to my cause and party to have neglected, as I have done, all occasion of extending my personal influence. Now that we have children, we must not overlook their interests for the indulgence of a selfish indolence."

Without exactly understanding in what way little Constance's prospects were to be advanced by her mother's dining with Lady Dawlish, Matilda gladly consented to accompany her husband. The secluded life she led at Selwood was an effort of submission on her part, not of choice: and she felt the inconsistency of their having mixed in the most brilliant coteries of continental society, while to that of London she was wholly a stranger. At Rome, Naples, Florence, Vienna, Lady Norman had shone a star in the highest circles of fashion; but it was *there* alone that she had formed the acquaintance of English people of her own condition of life.

Next day, at the hour appointed, the Normans proceeded to Grosvenor Square,—with a degree of punctuality savouring of the well-bred old-fashioned habits of the country and the continent. Nothing, however, was visible in the

drawing-room but a blazing fire, and the bag of lustrous glazed calico enclosing the chandelier ; and Matilda might have apprehended that she had mistaken the day, but for the intimation of the groom of the chambers, that “her ladyship had just gone up stairs to dress, and that the evening papers were on the table.”

By-and-by, Colonel Villiers sauntered in from White's, to flurry away to his dressing-room, on perceiving that two antediluvians were already arrived, though it was only a quarter past seven, and they had been asked at seven, meaning of course eight ; and in the course of the next three quarters of an hour, the room gradually filled with the seven others, who with the Normans and their hosts were to make up the sociable dozen.

Of these, the first two who made their appearance were fresh from Carlton House, with grave announcements of the severe illness of Queen Charlotte, — Lord Longwind and the Right Honourable Chandos Lydde, — two cabinet ministers and men of the world. Next came Sir Godfrey and Lady Chichester,

an ultra-fashionable couple of which the female variety was an amusing chatterbox of untirable loquacity. The fifth was an easy, agreeable, self-satisfied middle-aged man, whom everybody, called by a name which Lady Norman mistook for Ratstail or Ratstill,—but whether lord, baronet, or commoner, she could not guess;—so completely had Ned Raddesdell, the *bel esprit*, escaped the knowledge of Selwood Manor.

Two more were waited for to complete the party,—waited for till Matilda grew tired of waiting. But when, at twenty minutes after eight, a carriage stopped at the door, Lady Dawlish leant over to her and whispered, “I hope it will be no disagreeable surprise to you to meet your relations the Normans?—I find from Lady Catherine that all *guignon* is over (or ought to be) between you; and as those sort of family dissensions are out of date in the present century, I concluded you would be glad to *brusquer l'affaire*.”

What Lady Dawlish meant by this latter phrase, Matilda did not exactly understand. She felt that she should be content to wait an-

other hour for dinner, to allow time for Sir Richard's indignation to subside ere his offending relatives entered the room; but to her great surprise, he accepted with a smile Giles Norman's bow of recognition; and, on Lady Catherine's accosting her with inquiries after her little friend Walter and compliments on her rapid recovery, Sir Richard stepped forward courteously to take part in the conversation.

Frank Villiers now sauntering back into the room, followed by a heavy, ordinary, old man, whom Matilda mistook for the butler come to announce dinner, but who proved to be the Earl of Dawlish,—dinner was served.

Hitherto "Lady Dawlish's set" had been revealed to Matilda and her husband in eclipsed splendour,—drooping, as all plants are apt to droop after transplantation, in the ungenial soil of Paris; nor did it appear likely that their brilliancy would be more transcendant at a *sans façon*, autumnal dinner-party, the gold plate being at the bankers, and the striking members of the set scattered over the face of the three king-

doms. The Normans had lived enough out of the world to be surprised at discovering what extraordinary *recherche* may be communicated to a dinner without ostentation and a party whose merit consists in being appropriately assorted. The common-place grandeurs of Farleigh Castle and tedious state-dinners of foreign courts, had not prepared Matilda for the easy grace, the spirit of courtesy and enjoyment, prevalent among those endowed with such bad hearts, such good digestions, and such indifferent understandings, as Lady Dawlish's set.

Could Lord Longwind, with his playful repartees, be the tedious man in the course of one of whose parliamentary periods, a friend is said to have proceeded from the House of Lords six times round Westminster Abbey, arriving back at his place before the minister arrived at a full stop?—Could the agreeable right honourable to her right, overflowing with anecdotes pleasant but wrong, and as piquant as a volume of French memoirs, be the sage privy councillor of royalty, whose lengthy plausibilities on questions of national ethics were apt to set even the

bench of bishops into a snooze?—Even the chit-chat of Lady Chichester, though rapid, was far from vapid. Every point told. She poked right and left with her golden bodkin, till every one was fain to keep on the alert; and though Sir Godfrey talked only of cooks and jockeys,—the worthies and heroes of *his* school of the Fine Arts,—he talked of them with so much originality, as to render the subject as amusing as a fairy tale. Of Ratstail, or Raddesdell, she pondered with less surprise, but equal admiration; for it had already been whispered to her by Giles Norman (lest exposing herself she should immortalize the family name in the amber of an epigram), that he was the most eminent wit of the era.

“When do you set off for the North, my dear Lady Dawlish?”—inquired Lady Chichester of her friend.

“To-morrow, or to-morrow week, or to-morrow fortnight, as it may please the fates and Lord Dawlish to determine. But there is such a charming set of people in town, that I am very well-inclined to stay. Lord Dawlish gets

his rubber every night till every morning; and I have my rooms full every morning till every night. One *sees* one's friends at this time of year. An open house is a *trouvaille*. People do not forget their friends."

"It will remain very full till the holidays," observed Lady Catherine. "His Royal Highness does not go to Brighton till next month. You had much better remain here. What will you do at Eastport?"

"Her ladyship will entertain her country neighbours at her own expense, and entertain *herself* at *theirs*," said Reddesdell.

"I shall have to invite the whole country round," said Lady Dawlish, languidly. "We have not been at Eastport these ten months; and the house will want airing before we attempt our regular Christmas party. Mr. Chandos Lydde, remember *you* have promised us a fortnight this winter!—Mr. Norman and Lady Catherine are to be with us."

"I am half afraid!"—ejaculated Lady Catherine, in a tone of plausible regret. "His Royal Highness hinted last night that he counted upon

us for Brighton. However, I am going there to-night, and will feel my way about getting off."

"Whom are you likely to have to-night, eh?" inquired Colonel Villiers. "If I thought Madame de Wittagemot or that new Polish woman, would be there, I'd look in myself,—eh?—His Roanness (Royal Highness) has asked me four times during the last fortnight, and I have never found it convenient to go.—Last time I tried the thing, there was Bégrez and his troubadour songs, and that sort of trash, and our illustrious friend beating time,—eh?—"

"A little music before great people, who insist upon listening to it, is the devil," observed Raddesdell.

"One always has the best music at Carlton House," replied Lady Catherine; "and, in my opinion, it is the worst taste *not* to listen."

"My taste, then, is so bad, that I prefer staying away altogether,—eh?"—said Frank Villiers.

"By which you condemn *me* to the *peine forte et dure* of paying double court for your

sake," said Lady Dawlish. "But after the next brevet, my dear Frank, count no further upon my maternal virtue."

"I shall go to-night for two reasons," said Villiers, scrutinizing the consistency of a *canapé d'anchois* exactly as a F.R.S. would have examined the horns of a stag-beetle. "In the first place, I wish to admire the effect produced upon certain persons (whose last despatches from Herbault are, to my knowledge, of three weeks' date) by that exquisite turban of Lady Catherine's; and, in the next place, I have something very important to communicate to M'Mahon."

"Indeed?" — demanded Lady Catherine, lowering her voice, and vexed at the idea of anything important reaching the Blue Chamber through other hands and lips than her own.

And the moment Raddesdell perceived that Villiers had something to say concerning Carlton House which Lady Catherine Norman thought worth listening to, he wound up Lord Longwind into one of his long stories, under cover of pretending to listen to which, it was easy to seize the heads of the Regental secrets.

“Have you any private news from Kew?”—was her ladyship’s faint whisper, aware that the state of his royal mother was just then extremely distressing to the Prince.

“Kew?—From whom?—about what?—”

“About the improvement said to have manifested itself in the Queen’s health.”

“I am scarcely the sort of person to make myself a perambulating bulletin,” said Frank, with some indignation. “My news is from Geneva.”

“From Geneva?—”

“If you see M^r Mahon, tell him so.—*He* will understand.—”

“What *can* either of you have to do with Geneva?”—exclaimed Lady Catherine, with increasing curiosity.

“Tell him, I shall have it by New-year’s day.”

“I am scarcely the sort of person to make myself a perambulating enigma,” replied Lady Catherine, with a disdainful smile. “I work no telegraph of which I do not understand the signals.”

“ ’Tis an affair perfectly unimportant to any one but his Royal Highness,” said Frank, carelessly.

“ You will admit that most things of sufficient consequence to interest his Royal Highness are matters deserving the consideration of those who frequent his society?—”

“ Does your ladyship patronize Carlton House this winter ?” demanded Frank, with perfect *sang froid*.

“ Sufficiently to feel curious respecting a secret involving extremes so opposite as Geneva and Pall Mall.”

“ ’Pon my soul you do Geneva and Pall Mall too much honour in giving them a moment’s thought,” drawled Villiers, provokingly.

“ By the way, shall I see you to-morrow at Princess Wittagemot’s ?”—demanded Lady Catherine, adroitly. “ We dine there to meet the Duke of York, Lord Liverpool, Lord Castle-reagh, and a host of people?—”

And the brevet-aspiring Lieut.-Colonel, compelled to answer in the negative, immediately

found it expedient to add, by way of appeasing the anxieties of the lady frequenting such valuable society,—“ M'Mahon will inform you that the illustrious individuals expected from Geneva at Carlton House by New-year's day, are neither more nor less than a couple of caterpillars !—”

“ Creeping things innumerable !”—burst involuntarily from the lips of the listening Raddesdell, while Lady Catherine had nothing to reiterate but “ *caterpillars* ?—”

“ His royal highness, anxious to secure something new and original in the way of nick knack (to present to somebody or other by way of *étrennes*, eh ?)—and knowing me to be in constant correspondence with Bautte, desired M'Mahon to consult me. The thing has been kept a profound secret. I despatched a courier to Geneva without losing a moment, and by to-day's post the news reached me that Bautte's last novelty is on the road ;—a brace of green-enamel caterpillars with ruby eyes, that eat, drink, sleep, and crawl !—”

“ Like Christians !—Which of us do more ?”

again ejaculated the indiscreet Raddesdell, while Lord Longwind, who took the latter exclamation to be a commentary upon his own text—which happened to regard the arrest of a government clerk charged with robbing the Exchequer,—regarded him with unfeigned amazement.

“What have you done about Manchester to-day?”—inquired Chandos Lydde, at that moment opportunely addressing his legislative lordship.

“Nothing, or next to nothing.—Marched in a couple of regiments, and a company of artillery, as a hint.”

“Is Manchester disturbed again?”—demanded Lady Dawlish, with an air of disgust. “How troublesome those manufacturing districts are becoming!—”

“Oh! we shall soon bring them to reason,” said Lord Longwind, with a significant nod. “See how quiet they have been at Derby since the Brandreth affair.”

“It is highly disgusting to be bored, year after year, with the seditious struggles of those misguided creatures,” exclaimed Lady Dawlish.

“ Really people force themselves on public attention now-a-days, who, some years ago, would have blushed to hear the sound of their own name ! For my part I have forbidden the newspapers to enter the servants’ hall in any house of mine ; and if things go on at their present rate, I shall scarcely trust them *next* year in the stewards’ room. The country is in an alarming condition,—a condition *most* alarming to thinking minds !—”

“ How can you wonder !” said Chandos Lydde, with an air of grave indignation. “ The mob is not so much to blame. The mob would easily be kept in order ;—a wretched set of tame, spiritless, ignorant wretches, who dare not say their souls or their bodies are their own—if left to themselves. But when one finds men of family and education stirring them up to sedition,—men like Wolseley and Burdett, for instance, one has a *right* to feel indignant.”

“ Sir Francis will not be satisfied till he raises his head to the dignities of Temple Bar,” said Mr. Norman, knitting his brows. “ It is not such fellows as Thistlewood and Dr. Wat-

son who ought to be made examples of; but your radical baronets, who for the sake of being talked of, set the country into a state of conflagration."

"He never should have left the town unless for Newgate; or Newgate, unless for the place of execution!" said Lord Longwind. "If the throne and altar of this country should ever be brought to the dust, it will be remembered in history that Sir Francis Burdett was pioneer to the mob that first undermined their foundations."

"History will have something else to do than trouble herself with records so contemptible!" observed Lady Catherine Norman, looking stupendous. "You do not suppose, my dear Lord Longwind, that these wretched frame-breakings, and incendiary-fires, and Manchester meetings, will produce more effect upon the times, than if one of the Regent's enamel caterpillars had crawled over the parchment of Magna Charta?—It would be doing too much honour to the mob to fancy that a hundred thousand of them, with Sir Francis at their head, would produce the slightest effect upon the opinions of parliament."

The English mob is the most cowardly thing on earth,—a lunatic, which a little blood-letting soon brings to its senses; and as to the Baronet, you might readily draw his teeth and claws with a peerage. By the way, Lord Longwind, I fear you have forgotten your promise about the folding-doors and new staircase for my aunt Stavordale's apartments, at Hampton Court?—I had a note from her this morning, poor soul! assuring me that the Woods and Forests are the most uncivil people in the world. She has not spent six months in her apartments for the last ten years; yet they are always making objections about building her a stack of chimneys, or some such trifle. She has been putting in patent grates, (imagine the infamy of having to find your fixtures in a royal palace!) and they smoke so that she will be obliged to pass her Christmas at one of her son's, Lord Stavordale's, country-seats, or with her daughter, the Duchess of Ellesmere. Poor soul!—she has not above five thousand a-year jointure *pour tout potage*,—or she would give up those horrid apartments altogether.”

“ I will make a note of her ladyship’s wishes,” said Lord Longwind, bowing profoundly and taking out his tablets.

“ I wonder she did not apply for a pension !” —said Lady Dawlish, in a tone of compassion.—
“ Surely Lord Stavordale served in the first American war ?”

“ Certainly. He was aid-de-camp to somebody or other who was severely wounded, and experienced some miraculous escapes. I have heard my aunt Stavordale relate the story a hundred times.”

“ Why don’t she mention the circumstance to the Regent ?” —said Chandos Lydde, earnestly.
“ I remember the time when his royal highness never missed one of Lady Stavordale’s public breakfasts or masquerades. She has strong claims to his royal highness’s recollection.”

“ I really think I will give her a hint on the subject !” —replied Lady Catherine. “ These are not times for loyalty to go unrewarded.—”

“ I had a letter yesterday from Lady Arthur D.,” interrupted Lady Dawlish, “ in which she

begs me to reproach you, my dear Lady Catherine, with having neglected some request or protégé of hers.—What am I to tell her about it?—”

“Not a word!—A refusal would bring me half-a-dozen pressing letters from her; and suspense affords her hope, which, like ignorance, is bliss. To say the truth, I have made up my mind never to trouble myself again with any protégé of Lady Arthur’s! Somehow or other, she contrives to pick up a set of miserable wretches in actual want; and if one forgets their case, or misstates it, or any other trifle of that sort, they make such a fuss, and fancy themselves so horribly ill-used.—Last year, she wrote to me about some stupid old man she wanted to get made gate-keeper at Chelsea Hospital,—enclosing me a whole bundle of dirty papers that looked like turnpike-tickets,—certificates, and discharges, and that kind of rubbish. Most likely the housemaid found them lying about and lighted the fire with them, for I never beheld them again. Without them, it seems, there was no getting the place; and the ungrateful old man,

though I sent him a guinea to compensate his disappointment, actually had the audacity to write me word I had been the ruin of him; and the last time I saw Lady Arthur, she would have it that he had died of a broken-heart !—”

“ For the loss of a packet of old turnpike-tickets ?”—demanded Raddesdell, pretending to misunderstand the story. “ What an in-*toll*-erable invention !”

“ For the loss of his *place* rather,” said Lord Longwind, *really* misunderstanding Raddesdell; “ for which, after all, we have no proof that he was qualified.”

“ No ! Lady Catherine’s housemaid seems to have monopolized the *proofs* !” observed Raddesdell. “ But, after all, the discharges had better have missed fire.”

“ I really must say, in justice to mamma,” said Lady Catherine, abruptly, (and every one present wondered what Lady Roscrea could have to say to the veteran’s certificates,) “ that whenever *she* has people to push on, they are of a class who are glad to have their services rewarded by government, but can do

very well without. Her protégés are grateful if one succeeds for them; and if not, one hears nothing of hair-triggers or broken hearts. There was her friend Lionel Warde, you know," continued Lady Catherine, addressing Longwind and Lydde, "whom I plagued your lives and souls out to send governor to Nova Scotia, and you would not, because a military governor was wanted and Lionel Warde is only a barrister. Certainly mamma had just then a right to expect wonders from you, my dear Lord Longwind; for you know very well she had been making the Dublin dowagers' wigs stand on end, by receiving for your sake your friend Lady Theodosia, who is certainly not fit company for decent people."

"And to whose husband you gave that command in Ireland, because you could not get Lady Theodosia received in London!"—added Lady Chichester, laughing.

"And yet, when your letter of refusal arrived about Warde, mamma took it as well as if you had chosen to oblige her.—However, it did not much signify. She got him a commissioner-ship of bankrupts instead."

Feeling, perhaps, that these details of the “shop” could not be very entertaining to Matilda and her husband, and that her fair cousin was not serving her own cause with them by such naked truths, Lady Dawlish moved to the drawing-room; where Lady Norman had to undergo a thousand interrogatives touching her past proceedings and present projects. Lady Dawlish expressed her amazement that, after the dissipations of the continent, Matilda could settle down to the humdrum monotony of a country neighbourhood; while Lady Catherine took occasion to hint how gratifying it would be to her, could Sir Richard be persuaded to visit Brighton,—how happy certain distinguished leaders of the Tory party would feel, were Sir Richard Norman to disappear from the ranks of the enemy,—and how probable it was that, should emancipation ever be conceded, it would be by the party in power—the party so skilled in the policy of the French proverb of “giving a pea to catch a bean.”*

In vain did Matilda assure her, that she never

* Donner un pois pour attraper une fève.

attempted to influence the political opinions of her husband.

“ You, at least, permit *me* to attempt to influence them ?” demanded Lady Catherine.

“ Certainly !” replied her gentle companion.
“ But I warn you that it is labour lost.”

“ The labour we delight in physics pain !” replied the high priestess. All that evening, she devoted her attentions to the man whom she knew detested her ;—and on the following day, a footman (whose livery buttons bore the arm and battle-axe, and golden star, described by the young gentleman now at the Brighton preparatory,) left visiting cards in Hill Street from “ Mr. and Lady Catherine Norman.”

CHAPTER V.

So absolute she seems
And in herself complete.

MILTON.

WOMEN of the world have various ways of achieving their ends. Some stoop to conquer, others exalt themselves by bravado ;—some vanquish by sweetness, others by bitterness. Lady Catherine Norman was in the habit of accomplishing *her* purposes by an imperturbable sang froid. The coolness with which she parried the rebuffs of Sir Richard was amazing to the timid Matilda. In her ladyship's days of subordinate consequence, when an effort was indispensable to enable her to keep her slippery place in

society, she had been loud and insolent. But having now attained what she considered a post of honour, she maintained her perilous footing, like other rope-dancers, by the calmness of her audacity. There was a silent positiveness about her, as forcible as the quiet current of a deep and dangerous river.

Matilda said "not at home" to her ladyship's visits,—declined her invitations to dinner,—replied to her hand-kissings, when they met in their morning drive, by a repulsive bow. But Lady Catherine had an object in view, and heedless of rebuke, went silently and obstinately towards its accomplishment.

Now that all hope was gone of achieving a higher private fortune than the possession of Grove Park and three thousand a-year, to which by the death of the old banker they had that spring succeeded, (thereby, as is often the case with modern heirs, losing their credit from being obliged to pay their debts,) she began to cast her eyes around her in search of other chances of aggrandizement.

She had interest, as it is called, to command

everything which interest *can* command; and the proprietorship of a couple of rotten-boroughs would scarcely have effected more for the insignificant Mr. Norman, than the pair of blue eyes in the handsome head of his wife. But his catholicism unluckily threw him out of the line of advancement. There was no doing anything for him. The disabilities which had made a banker of the father seemed likely to make a bankrupt of the son. Old Giles, detesting the haughty, protestant daughter-in-law, by whom his eldest son had been seduced from the paths of the stock exchange, had bequeathed to his three younger sons his business in Lothbury; and to Lady Catherine's self-conceited husband, his Hertfordshire estates, and an income which would have enabled him to enjoy them, had he not previously created for himself an income of double the amount, the departed capital of which was now to be paid off in the shape of post-obits.

But though disqualified to be forwarded to a government in British America, or a military command in Ireland, though not even "*du bois*

dont on fait des colonels,” young Norman did not despair of promotion; for Lady Catherine had pledged herself that he should be promoted. In the earlier times of their marriage, the Grove Park family had attempted to raise themselves to the level of her aristocratic pretensions by constantly asserting, that there was a dormant peerage in the family, which law or equity, or parliament—which is supposed to represent both,—might at any time revive in their favour; to which boast, uttered by Agatha and her brothers, old Norman usually replied by inquiring, how they thought “Lord Woodchurch and Co.” would look engraved upon his brass-plate in Lothbury, or inscribed on the creditor side of the banking-books of his constituents?—But the statement had reached beyond the ear of his daughter-in-law; and when his demise conveyed to her husband these rights of aristocratic heirship, she set all the faculties and industry of poor old Sir Isaac Heard into movement, to investigate the claim.

For though her ladyship’s influence with Carlton House and its ministries would avail

nothing towards the *creation* of a catholic peer, it might forward a claim of restoration; and she trusted she had only to prove herself entitled to become Lady Woodchurch, to secure her coronation rights as a peeress of the realm.

But, alas ! no sooner had the Herald's Office commenced its ferret-like operations among the archives of the White Tower, British Museum, and other sepulchres of decaying parchments, than it appeared that the most important documents relating to the Woodchurch peerage must be in the possession of Sir Richard Norman, of Selwood Manor; nay, that it depended only upon himself to put in a counter claim by opposing the petition of his kinsman !

This was sad news for Lady Catherine !—She could not forget, or trust that the Normans had forgotten, the insults she had heaped upon them in Paris. They were her enemies,—enemies of her own creation.—Still, she reckoned largely upon the instability which the frivolousness of modern society produces, even in our enmities. If “ Unstable as water, thou shalt not *excel* ”—thou canst not *abhor*.—For it were

as easy to imprint a durable impression upon the shifting sands of the sea-shore, as upon the mobile characters of a man or woman of the world !—

Had the Normans been thorough-paced, London fashionables, a few smirks, smiles, and plausibilities might have salved over their wounds. But even in her haughtiest day of insolence, she had stood somewhat in awe of the handsome Baronet. There was a sternness, or abstraction, or she scarcely knew what, in his nature, defying at once her captivations and her aggressions. But it was not for such a self-reliant spirit to despair. She attacked him in what she knew to be a vulnerable point, by her caresses of little Walter ; and followed up the manœuvre by a series of civilities and cajolements to his wife.

The same feeling which had prompted Norman to accept the invitation of Lady Dawlish, at length caused him to succumb under the load of Lady Catherine's courtesy.

“ The old brute, my guardian, is gone,” said he. “ The daughter they wanted to force upon

me is married. Of the rest of the family, I know nothing. Lady Catherine's husband is a mere nonentity; and as we are likely to be thrown together in society, better accommodate ourselves with a good grace to the evil !—”

Recalling to mind his former virulence in Paris, and his often repeated charges to her to avoid all intercourse with the Normans, Matilda's countenance expressed the surprise consequent upon so unaccountable a transition.

“ No need of perpetuating grievances ? ”—cried Sir Richard, replying to her looks. “ It will be an advantage hereafter to the children to be on good terms with the various branches of the family ;—more especially Walter, who has so much to apprehend from their animosity.”

Carefully as Matilda was now schooling herself to place the two children upon a par in her estimation of their rights, if not in her personal affection, it nevertheless startled her when she found Sir Richard thus undisguisedly advocating the interests of the little foundling. It must of course be so.—The adoption could

not be made by halves.—Still she wondered that his heart's blood stirred not more warmly towards the little Constance,—her own image, his own offspring,—than towards the child of some Parisian outcast,—the child of shame,—the child of sin.

It was no small aggravation of her momentary pique, that Walter's future interests required her to sacrifice her repugnance and accept in good part the advances of Lady Catherine Norman. Though Matilda's nature was ill-qualified to form an accurate estimation of the odiousness of such a woman, she experienced involuntary disgust whenever she found herself in company with the intrigante. Unable to measure the extent of her misdoings, the glittering exterior of the serpent was almost as distasteful as would have been the latent venom she had not the science to decompose.—Lady Catherine's unwomanly hardness,—her sneers at everything good and virtuous,—her innate, ingrained, intolerant, and intolerable worldliness,—filled poor Matilda's heart with uneasy feelings when tête-à-tête with the Pytho-

ness of Carlton House. She longed to escape to Selwood Manor, and the family circle which Christmas was to bring around her,—from the intrusions of the Normans and others of Lady Dawlish's set.

On the eve, however, of her departure for Worcestershire, Sir Richard urged her to fulfil a long-standing engagement to visit Covent-garden Theatre, and enjoy for the first time one of the exquisite and feminine performances of Miss O'Neill, then in the zenith of her fame. The "Dawlish set" affected to trace a likeness between Matilda and that charming actress; one of Lady Catherine's standing jests in Paris, when her fair rival appeared in society, attired in a black velvet dress, that displayed to peculiar advantage the fairness of her hair and complexion, being to exclaim, as she entered the room, "Here comes Isabella, the heroine of the Fatal Marriage!"—Lady Dawlish had lately made it her request that she might enjoy the satisfaction of introducing Matilda to her prototype; and it was mortifying to the simple-hearted Lady Norman,

that her pleasures should be thus studied by one whose gratification she could not feel inclined to study in return.

On repairing to the theatre, however, it appeared that it was the royal box they were to occupy, per favour of Lady Catherine; and that instead of having projected the party for *her* enjoyment, their conversation did not suffer five minutes' interruption to admit of her appreciating the performances. Yet brief as were the snatches permitting the novice to admire the inimitable enunciation and touching pathos of the most feminine of actresses, her attention was enthralled to a degree which rendered painful the interruptions of her companions. She did not fail to note, as she had often noted before, that nothing can exceed the ill-breeding of an exclusive. Instead of compassionating her sympathy with the stage, Lady Norman's tears seemed only to stimulate the activity of their senseless prattle.

At length, Sir Richard, out of patience with their impertinence, rose and quitted the box;

and no sooner had he taken refuge in some quieter seat, than the real purpose of their visit to the theatre became apparent. From that moment there was not even a pretence of interest in the woes of Isabella, or the wrongs of Biron.

“I have some papers here, my dear Lady Norman, which I wish you to study,” said Lady Catherine, drawing a packet from the embroidered bag which it was the fashion of that day to drag about; “or rather (as you have little taste, I fancy, for genealogies and patents), which I entreat you to recommend to the attention of Sir Richard.”

“If they relate in any way to the affairs of the late Mr. Norman,” observed Matilda, drawing back, “pray say nothing to him on the subject. All former animosities are extinguished. It would surely be injudicious to rake them up!”

“I should scarcely describe them as relating to the *affairs* of the late Mr. Norman,” replied Lady Catherine, with contempt. “With his trading interests, thank Heaven, we have ceased to entertain the slightest concern. But they re-

late to a matter in which he is represented by my husband. Mr. Norman's claims dying with him are, of course, vested in Giles."

Matilda looked puzzled, and was about to turn away in the hope of being allowed to bestow her attention on the sorrows of the wretch "who should have died at Candy;" when Lady Catherine began to enter into a thousand circumstantialities relating to the Woodchurch peerage.

"But since Mr. Norman, as representative of this Jeffrey Norman, Lord Woodchurch, is *entitled* to the Barony, of what service can be the concurrence of my husband?"—demanded the simple-hearted Matilda.

"Of no real service. But it will wear a better appearance that the family should be unanimous on the question."

"Sir Richard can have no motive to dispute the rights of Mr. Norman more than those of any other person," replied Matilda. "But he has not the smallest parliamentary interest, and will, I fear, be of little use."

"As to *interest*," said Lady Catherine, glanc-

ing loftily towards Lady Dawlish, "our cause is safe enough. All I wish to be assured is that we shall meet with no opposition from any member of the family."

"I will give the papers and your message to Sir Richard," replied Matilda, eager to dismiss the business, "and leave him to discuss the matter with Mr. Norman."

But throughout the evening, though the question of peerages and genealogies was carefully avoided, the influence of her views concerning both was visible in every word uttered by Lady Catherine. She seemed smitten with a sudden rapture of enthusiasm for the beauty of Sir Richard's person, and the endowments of his mind; protested, that till the previous day in the park, she had never happened to notice his admirable air, when witching the world with noble horsemanship,—nor, till Lady Dawlish's dinner-party, the superiority of his talents. The lady who prevented Napoleon's courtiers from discussing the symmetry of the Emperor's hand by exclaiming, "*de grace, ne parlons point politique!*"—might have parried the flatteries

of Lady Catherine by observing, "Wait till the petition is before the house!—"

On their return home that night from the *petit souper* at Lady Dawlish's which closed the labours of the evening, Sir Richard received from his weary wife an account of her mission, and the papers which she promised to return in his name to Lady Catherine Norman, if he did not choose to be at the trouble of examination.

"Not *examine* them?"—cried he, entering with ardour into the cause. "You cannot suppose that I am going to take those people's word concerning this Woodchurch peerage?—It may turn out of high importance to Walter!—I shall sift the affair with the greatest nicety. I remember hearing the Abbé O'Donnell mention, that my father always conceived himself to be the head of the Woodchurch branch of the family."

"But Lady Catherine insinuates, that it is only through her family interest that the title is likely to be revived in their favour; and that for any other branch, nothing would be available."

“Then I am convinced that my claims are as good as theirs!”—cried Sir Richard. “She would not have held out that intimation, unless for purposes of discouragement.—Give me the roll of papers.—I will examine them before I sleep this night.”

“After being talked to death for the last five hours, your mind is surely not in a state to form any accurate judgment,” observed Lady Norman.

“I shall lay the case before the accurate judgment of the first genealogists of the day,” replied her husband. “All I would ascertain to-night is, the extent of Lady Catherine’s audacity in attempting to cant me out of my family rights.”

And in spite of his fatigues, Sir Richard remained till morning poring over the papers injudiciously committed to his hands; and was ultimately so convinced of the priority of his claims, that, after allowing himself only an hour or two for repose, he posted off in search of the eminent lawyer to whose consideration he had determined to refer the case.

“The question scarcely admits of dispute as a matter of *right*,” was the answer given, on a cursory view of the documents. “What it may become as a matter of favour, is another thing. The petitioning party must have tolerable reliance on the strength of their parliamentary interest, to fancy the lords would confirm so halting a claim as the best which, even if unopposed, they seem prepared to make out.”

Sir Richard returned from this legal interview in the highest spirits. Snatching little Walter upon his knee at dessert, he drank to him as the future Lord Woodchurch. He seemed to exult in the idea of this new aggrandizement, chiefly for the sake of the boy; and informed Lady Norman that so necessary did he consider it to be on the spot to assist the researches of his legal adviser, and reply to the proposals of the Normans, that it would be impossible for him to accompany her the following day to Selwood Manor.

With a thousand apologies and excuses for

this resolution, he entreated Matilda to make excuses to her family for the duty towards his "children," which rendered it incumbent on him to despatch her alone into Worcestershire, to do the honours of Selwood Manor.

CHAPTER VI.

Poor maid,
That for thy mother's fault art thus expos'd
To loss and what may follow. Weep I cannot,
But my heart bleeds; and most accurs'd am I,
To be by oath enjoin'd to this!

SHAKSPEARE.

No triumphal arches, no flags, no garlands, awaited little Constance Norman on her first arrival upon the territory of her forefathers. There was not even an exulting father to hold her up to the admiration of the village, as the carriage rolled through Selwood. But Matilda was too happy in the beauty and well-being of her unexpected treasure, to experience even a momentary pang of mortification. She was returning home, in safety and happiness, with

her babe smiling at her bosom ; and it became her not to lament, either the presence of little Walter, or the absence of Sir Richard. It was vexatious to find that Mrs. Ravenscroft had quitted the village to spend her Christmas holidays at Tuxwell Park ; and that four and twenty hours must elapse ere she had the joy of exhibiting the beauties of “ Miss Norman ” to eyes more discriminating than those of the purblind housekeeper, and old family steward, who looked unlovingly upon its little heretic face. But next day, her family were to assemble,—her grey-headed father,—her happy brother and sister ; bringing with them the strangers they were about to introduce to her affection.

The meeting was a joyous one on all sides. The little family party travelled together, and made their appearance within ten minutes of the appointed time. But even while admiring, at Matilda’s suggestion, the beauties of her children, and offering their heartfelt greetings to herself, frowns overcast the brows of John Maule and Avesford, on learning the uncourteous absence of the master of the mansion ; the one

resenting the insult for himself,—the other, for his father.

“Tom Cruttenden prophesied that Sir Richard would not be on the spot to receive us!” mused old Maule. But he fortunately mused in silence,—too deeply penetrated by the delight of folding a new generation of his descendants to his bosom to murmur at trivial grievances. The poor old man fancied that the instincts of nature were stirring powerfully within him, as he laid his hand in benediction upon the head of the heir of Selwood; and assured Matilda, that he could trace in the boy’s dark eyes a strong resemblance to her brother William.

“The girl is a pretty babe enough,” said the old gentleman, glancing carelessly at Constance. “But you mustn’t expect me, my dear, to think so much of *her* as of Walter. Your son’s a noble little fellow, Matty; and I love him the more for reminding me so strongly of my poor Bill. Missy is fair you see, and less like the Maule part of the family. Missy, I warrant, is the image of some of the Normans who,

if I'm to judge by their portraits in the gallery, were most of them sallow-faced bodies."

"Surely *I* must have been once as fair as Constance," pleaded Matilda, piqued for the honour of her babe.

"To be sure you were, my dear. *You* took after your mother's relations. *You* never bore the least resemblance to your brothers and sisters."

Lady Norman interrupted a discussion interesting only to her father and herself, to explain, to the best of her power, the urgency of the business which detained her husband in town. But though they laboured to look politely convinced of the necessity for his absence, an irrepressible glance of contemptuous incredulity was visible in the intelligent countenance of the young merchant, which was not lost upon Matilda.

John Maule and his wife were sober, steady, serious people, attached to their tranquil routine of life; who, regarding their journey into Worcestershire as a sacrifice made to the wishes of the old gentleman, were rather glad than sorry

to be spared the additional exertions which must have arisen from the presence of Sir Richard. The husband, after renouncing his father's noisy calling, and betaking himself to the church as the quietest of the learned professions, had selected his wife as the most silent young lady of his acquaintance,—intending to pass through life in methodical obscurity, discharging the duties of a parish priest in their narrowest acceptation ;—officiating in the parish church one hundred and ten times in the course of the year, and reading family prayers in his own parlour seven hundred and thirty. His parsonage was neat and trimly to a miracle. A Dutch excess of cleanliness caused the furniture to shine, the grates to glitter, the shaven lawn and closely trimmed espaliers to put forth their monotonous verdure. His parishioners rarely called forth his reproofs, unless by disorderliness in their persons, or untidiness in their households ; and his favourites in the village were supposed to shave or whitewash, sweep or garnish their way to the parson's good graces.

If cleanliness, according to the proverb, be secondary only to godliness, John Maule was a semi-saint after his kind. Circumscribed in understanding and unexpansive in affections, he was content to take Selwood as he found it; regretting only that so extensive and well-wooded a park would not by any expenditure of old women and besoms, be delivered from the disfigurement of its withered leaves.

The methodical parson and his shy, nervous, little wife were very different beings from the frank, sensible Elizabeth, and her firm, strong-minded husband. While John Maule complimented Lady Norman upon her looks, and thought it wonderful she should look so young and pretty, after being racketed all over Europe, and exposed to the inconvenience of sea-voyages and land-journeys almost as harassing and distracting as the uproar of Cruttenden Maule's Birmingham manufactory, — Charles Avesford considered it far more extraordinary that she should preserve such cheerful spirits, after spending fourteen years in the company of

an ill-tempered, disagreeable man, useless in his generation, yet as proud of himself as if he lived to confer benefits upon mankind.

Matilda, meanwhile, though grieved to notice the declining health of her father, and find her brother married to a non-entity, soon began to experience that happy frame of feeling arising from a family re-union after long sojourn in a land of strangers. There were distant kindred to be inquired for, of whose names for years she had heard no mention. There were entertaining anecdotes to be listened to, of the increasing eccentricities of Tom Cruttenden and young Crutt, related with good-humoured drollery by Avesford. There was a description of Fern Hill to be extracted from Elizabeth, and an account of John's parsonage,—“small certainly, but singularly commodious,”—interrupted by little agitated allusions from Mrs. Maule to their prospect of an early removal to Woldham Rectory.

Matilda listened, pleased to find them all so happy in their lot; and gratified in turn by her sympathy, every heart warmed towards her. Before dinner was over, all present *felt* that it was

a family-party ; and, in spite of the massive plate, stately liveries, and august dining-room, forgot that their dear Matty was Lady Norman of Selwood Manor, with a chance of being shortly saluted as the lady of the Right Honourable Lord Woodchurch.

To herself, all was sunshine thus surrounded by those to whom she knew herself to be an object of pride and affection ; till the moment of dessert, when it was the custom of Sir Richard, as of all partial parents, for Walter to make his appearance. Matilda had not dared revoke, during her husband's absence, the order for Master Norman's joining the party ; and he was accordingly paraded by Ghita, as usual, to the head of the table, and greeted with caresses by the guests. As the Italian stooped to draw a chair for her charge, her eyes unfortunately encountered those of her lady ; and Matilda read, or fancied she read there, pity and contempt for her hypocrisy, in accepting for the alien the tenderness of her poor old, white-headed father. Her hireling seemed to be rejoicing in the consciousness of moral superiority.

That moment, the happy family meeting forfeited its charm in the eyes of Lady Norman!—Instead of feeling proud of welcoming her father, sister, and brother under her roof, and evincing her affection for them in presence of their new connexions, she was conscious only that they were sitting at the board of a deceiver, and that their honest hearts and blameless lives were aggrieved by the collision. It was not the highborn wealthy Baronet's wife doing the honours of his family mansion to the manufacturer, the merchant, the village-priest; it was the foresworn evil-doer, sitting at meat with those whose souls disdained an untruth, and who would have recoiled from the commission of an act such as she had dishonourably adventured!—

When the generous wine sparkled in a crystal goblet engraved with the armorial bearings of the Normans, in the trembling hand of old Maule, he exclaimed, “Toasts, they tell me, are old-fashioned things; but I must have one to-day!—Here's a health to my grandson!—here's

health and prosperity to the heir of Selwood !”— And while his son and son-in-law pledged him in a hearty bumper, Elizabeth, leaning across her husband, grasped with affectionate pressure the hand of her sister.

“ May he live to be a blessing to you,” said Mrs. Avesford, ere she raised the glass to her lips ; while Matilda, pale and trembling, had not courage to bid the smiling boy embrace his grandfather and aunt. Her mind was absorbed in the painful reflection that of her own fair girl, in whose veins alone their kindred blood was flowing, no one uttered a syllable !—

Nor were her sufferings diminished by the child-like questionings of little Walter concerning his new relatives. “ Are you my mamma’s papa?—Are you my mamma’s brothers and sisters?—Why are you not so pretty as she is?—What made you come here?—When are you going away ?”—and so forth. But for the readiness of Avesford who saw from the variations of Lady Norman’s countenance that something was amiss, though he could not divine

the cause of her disturbance, the boy would have continued to pursue his awkward interrogatories unanswered.

“ We are come here that you may shew us Selwood Manor House, and park, and village,” said he to the indulged little fellow. “ And in return, you shall come and see *me*, Walter, and I will shew you ships and sailors, and the beautiful birds and shells they bring me from distant countries.”

The child’s attention thus attracted, he was soon established on Avesford’s knee, asking a thousand questions, and unfolding the little budget of his own traveller’s reminiscences; but it was not till he retired for the night, that Matilda became restored to her wonted composure.

A week had been originally fixed for the duration of the visit; and Lady Norman trusted that, in a day or two, Sir Richard would be released from his London engagements to admit of the christening of her child taking place during their stay. For to have the ceremony performed during her husband’s absence was a

thing not to be thought of. Extended intercourse with the world had done little to detach the heart of that gentle wife and mother from its chartered affections. The first object of her life was still the froward husband, by whose all-potent influence she had been swayed to wrong; the second, the little creature, the flower springing to adorn her autumnal day, which she trusted was to unite them in yet closer affection. In former days, indeed, she had believed want of offspring to be the solitary cause of their estrangement; and if now the birth of Constance failed to knit anew the slackened ties of his early love, it would be occasioned by the interposition of the young Ishmael she had fostered under her roof.

Matilda felt it her duty to omit no occasion of awakening the parental instincts of Norman in favour of his daughter. His tenderness must *be cultivated* in behalf of Constance. He must be allowed to omit no customary form of kindness. He *must* be present at her christening, though differing in ceremonial from those of his professed church. Injudicious mother! who

sought to impose the claims of her child as a tax upon the feelings of her husband !—

Two days, however, alone remained of their visit, and no Sir Richard made, or promised to make, his appearance. Elizabeth and Avesford settled it apart that he was an ill-bred, ill-conditioned being; an Ethiop unworthy to wear on his brow so rich a jewel as Matilda. But they accompanied Lady Norman with such pleased alacrity to visit the most striking spots of her picturesque neighbourhood, and the whole party seemed to enjoy themselves so much, viewing her schools and almshouses, the village being enlivened at that moment by its annual distribution of blankets and good cheer, that she fancied her husband's slight had been unfelt. John Maule and his wife were content with the calm monotony of Selwood, which they pronounced to be almost as quiet as their own parsonage, congratulating Matilda on being so little molested by the troublesome claims of a neighbourhood; and Avesford, though he preferred the busy prospects of his humbler domain to the boundless extent of indistinct landscape weary-

ing the eye at the Manor, had taste and information to appreciate the value of its fine library, and interesting collection of works of art.

Old Maule, meanwhile, had other objects to absorb his attention. At once proud and fond of his grandchildren, he was never weary of being led about by young Norman to visit in the park his favourite pony,—in the gardens, his favourite seat,—in the house, the gallery containing his favourite suit of armour.—Matilda almost trembled to see with what infatuation her father was attaching himself to the boy.

“How amazed my friend Cruttenden would be, Matty, to see you the mother of such a princely little fellow!”—said he, one evening to Lady Norman, after obtaining her promise that a first-rate artist should be engaged at his expense to make a portrait of his beautiful grandson. “Tom has not quite forgiven you, my dear, for not naming one of your children after him. I have a notion, however, he will remember your son handsomely in his will. All he has in the world is to go to my descendants; and as your brother Crutt seems set against

matrimony, and yours are, at present, the only young ones in the family, I shouldn't be surprised if the heir of Selwood were eventually to inherit as good a property from his mother, as from all his grand ancestors put together !—Girls are none the better for fortunes. It only makes them the prey of fortune-hunters. But we must see and do our best for Sir Walter Norman !—”

At Matilda's request, who began to suspect that her husband would prolong his sojourn in London as irregularly as he had formerly done in Paris, the little party agreed to remain an additional day at the Manor. Some time would probably elapse ere their return thither. She felt less able than formerly to confront the isolation of a secluded life. Her rearing had been among the familiar and sociable. Her nature had not been trained for the aristocratic seclusion of Selwood ; and now, alas ! she had lost even the peace of mind which had rendered solitude, if not delightful, supportable.

It was not the many-coloured scenery of the continent, or her recent gay associations in London, which inspired her with a dread of *ennui*

during the absence of Sir Richard. The cheerful spirit of Avesford, and the companionableness of his wife, rendered her deeply conscious of the blessing derivable from pleasant intercourse. In his happiest moods, the tone of Sir Richard's mind was pitched a key above or below her own. He was a casuist,—a theorist; unsympathizing with the march of mankind, or the homely interests of life. Egotism closes the human heart as effectually as misanthropy; and while the Avesfords were golden links in the mighty chain of humanity, despising nothing and nobody either agreeable or useful to their fellow-creatures, Sir Richard Norman surveyed the world with universal contempt.

Enchanted to find in Matilda a woman unspoiled by the world,—sweet amid domestic bitterness, and humble amid a thousand incentives to arrogance and pretension,—they gladly agreed to postpone their departure; but scarcely had the point been conceded, when, to the annoyance of the whole party, and the dismay of Matilda, Sir Richard Norman made his appearance. On her return from a drive with her

father and the Avesfords (while John and his silent mate performed their daily constitutional round of the shrubberies), she was informed that her husband was in the library; and found him seated on the sofa, with Walter upon his knee!—

The greeting was constrained on both sides. The husband made no movement to join his guests,—the wife dared not propose it;—but as Matilda took a place silently by his side, he put down the boy, and extended his hand kindly towards her. Lady Norman now noticed in his appearance an air of languor and indisposition inducing her to exclaim—“It was illness, then, and not business, that detained you in town!—Dearest Norman, why did you not write me word that you were indisposed?—”

“I have not been ill,” he replied. “But a thousand untoward circumstances have occurred to thwart me. I delayed my return, therefore, till I thought I was likely to be alone with you. I hoped these people would be gone!—”

“They have only two more days to remain here,” replied Matilda. “They are all anxious to return home. It was only as a concession to

my earnest request that they agreed to stay another day."

Sir Richard involuntarily shrugged his shoulders; then, perceiving the mortified air which overspread the features of his wife, he added—"Forgive me, dearest Matilda!—But, when vexed by the contrarieties of life, I cannot expect from others the indulgence I meet from yourself; and I am just now so much out of sorts as scarcely to be fit society for those who have so strong a claim on my attention."

"Make me, at least, one promise," said Matilda, bitterly. "My family have only twenty-four hours to remain under your roof. Treat them with the courtesy you bestow on strangers, and give them not reason to fear that our fire-side is harassed by care. My father is old and ailing. Let him die in the cheering belief that his child is happy as she is prosperous. In the name of that boy," she continued, pointing to Walter, who, having slid from Sir Richard's knee, stood aloof, amusing himself with some childish pastime,—“I require you to conduct yourself with kindness and consideration

towards those who have never failed in kindness and consideration for you or yours!—”

Startled by this appeal, Sir Richard rose, took her arm under his, and proceeding at once to the drawing-room, welcomed every member of Matilda's family to his house with a grace and courtesy of high-breeding so like the Sir Richard Norman of other times, that Matilda was gratified to perceive how instantaneous an influence he was usurping over the feelings of Avesford and her brother.

On retiring for the night, however, she was still more gratified to find the favourable impression reciprocal. Hitherto, her husband had come in contact only with the less-gifted members of her family ; and the ill-timed lectures of his father-in-law, and obtrusive vulgarity of young Crutt, had not prepared him for the quiet good-breeding of John Maule, or the intelligent manliness of Avesford. Even old Maule, as a doting grandfather, was more bearable than as the automaton whose wires were worked by Tom Cruttenden.

“ Mrs. Avesford has been more fortunate

than her sister, Matilda !” said he, with a melancholy smile. “ She has chosen a man of sense and education, with too much feeling to neglect her happiness, and too much principle to mislead her judgment. So much the better for all of us !—Avesford may become a valuable counsellor to you and yours. It is a comfort to me to find him so superior a man.”

“ What need have I of the advice of my sister’s husband, while I am secure of *yours* ?” demanded Matilda, with an involuntary feeling of alarm.

“ We are all mortal.—I am ten years older than yourself.—I have not accustomed you much to the exercise of your own judgment,” said Norman, endeavouring to smile away the apprehensions he saw gathering in the countenance of his wife. “ But be of good cheer, Matilda. I mean to live many years yet, to try your patience. Meanwhile, admit that Avesford is a fine, gentlemanly fellow,—a pleasant inmate,—and valuable addition to our family.

“ So untrue is it that all men are equals,” observes Dr. Johnson, “ that no two men ever

remained half an hour in each other's company without the one obtaining a superiority over the other."

In the course of a single evening, Charles Avesford had obtained a decided ascendancy over his brother-in-law !"

CHAPTER VII.

I something do excuse the thing I hate
For his advantage whom I dearly love.

SHAKSPEARE.

It was gratifying to the sisters to perceive, on the morrow, with what readiness their husbands fell into each other's society. Each was agreeably surprised in the qualities of the other; and Sir Richard experienced real delight in pointing out the natural beauties of his estate to one who had good taste to appreciate them, and in discussing its management with one who had valuable advice to bestow. They rode together over the park and home-farm of Selwood; and Elizabeth and Matilda exchanged glances on their return, implying a mutual conviction that

their future intercourse would be such as they could desire.

Nevertheless, the quick-sighted Avesford had already discovered that all was not well with Sir Richard. In spite of his efforts to be companionable, and his desire to appear to advantage, it was plain that something hung heavy on the spirits of the Baronet.

During the christening ceremony of the morning, he was almost as much affected by the sensible and impressive reading of John Maule, as Matilda had been by the same service performed at Farleigh Castle; and his deportment throughout the evening was so mild and depressed,—so different from what the Avesfords were prepared to expect,—that Elizabeth instinctively attributed his meekness to indisposition, and her husband, to mental affliction.

As they sat together after coffee, Elizabeth discussing with Sir Richard the probability that little Constance would grow up into a striking resemblance of her mother, Avesford suddenly interrupted them by remarking, “ I don’t doubt she will be pretty; but the boy is positively

the finest fellow in England. We shall have a famous description to give of him to our neighbour Lady Audley. I believe, Sir Richard, she is a near connexion of yours?"

"A distant cousin," replied Sir Richard, greatly surprised.

"She was a Norman, I think?—'Agatha Norman?'—I remember seeing the name in an old music-book which she lent my wife."

"You are acquainted with her, then?"

"Sir Thomas is our nearest neighbour. Lady Audley's society is a great acquisition to Bessy."

"But you do not always reside at Fern Hill?"—inquired Sir Richard, as if the proximity of his cousin Agatha was no great incentive to the performance of his promise to take Matilda and the children early in the summer to visit the Avesfords.

"Oh no,—from May till November only. My house of business in Liverpool is a commodious family residence. We remain in the country only so long as the weather enables me to come backwards and forwards."

“ Perhaps, then,” observed Sir Richard, “ you will have no objection to extend your hospitality to us in April instead of June. The scene at Liverpool would be a novelty to Matilda. She has never seen an English maritime city, or docks, or anything of the kind.”

“ No, no, no !”—cried Avesford, laughing ; “ you shall drive over from Fern Hill and visit our lions. But it would not amuse you to find yourself running all day against trucks, bales, puncheons, jars, and chests. My compting-house and warehouses are immediately connected with my dwelling-house. I have often heard old Cruttenden describe the consternation of your looks when you were first introduced to the factory ; and should feel vexed, I fear, to see you disgusted by the stir and bustle which constitute *my* pride and glory. There is nothing interesting or picturesque in commercial details. Such things may look well enough from the Rialto at Venice, or Mole at Genoa ; but we Liverpool folks are plain matter-of-fact people.”

“ And the proudest people of my acquaintance, my dear Avesford !” observed John Maule,

with a quiet smile. "I never met with so much etiquette and ostentation (except in a Cathedral Close) as when, two years ago, you introduced me to your thrones and dominions. In point of classical and literary taste, too, what city in the empire competes with Liverpool?—"

"Pho, pho!—we tried to astonish the country parson," said Avesford, good-humouredly; "we were afraid you should come the pedant over *us*, and forestalled you by coming the alderman and Roscoe over *you*!—But, joking apart, Sir Richard, you would enjoy yourself more at Fern Hill; the situation of which is beautiful and the air singularly fine; to say nothing of the pleasure the Audleys would have in forming the acquaintance of their cousins."

"I know nothing of Lady Audley," said Sir Richard, stiffly. "I have not seen her since she was a child, and I, her father's ward."

"She is a spirited, high-minded woman," said Avesford. "I am sure you would like her. Her brother, too, is a fine young man."

"Lady Audley has several brothers."

“ I alluded to Rupert Norman, who spent several months with the Audleys last year. He is partner in a house of business [at Trieste, trading largely with Liverpool; and took the opportunity of having affairs to settle among us, to bring over his Italian lady on a visit to his family.”

Sir Richard Norman appeared so silently indifferent to the proceedings of this branch of her family, that Matilda, who had been hitherto engaged in conversation with Mrs. Maule and her father, thought it civil to interpose.

“ Is Mrs. Rupert Norman a handsome woman ?”—she enquired.

“ Strikingly handsome,” replied Elizabeth, joining in the discussion. “ The elder brother is married, *I* believe, to a woman of rank. Of *her*, Lady Audley seems to know nothing; but she soon grew extremely attached to Benedetta. I cannot say *I* was very fond of her. There is something wild and fierce about her eyes.”

“ Something Italian, perhaps ?” observed Matilda.

“ Italian, with a vengeance !” cried Avesford.

“Your ‘souls made of fire, and children of the sun,’ may be admirable ingredients for a tragedy or opera ; but they are the devil among the decencies of private life !—For my part, I stood in positive awe of Madame Norman, and have liked Audley Oaks much better since her departure.”

“They are gone, then ?” demanded Norman, who had borne no part in the recent conversation.

“To Trieste, probably, by this time. They left Lancashire on a visit to their relations in the south.”

And Sir Richard evincing no further curiosity on the subject, the discussion fell to the ground.

On parting finally from Mrs. Avesford on the morrow, Matilda felt ashamed to avow how likely she thought this unlucky neighbourhood with the Audleys, to interrupt their projected intercourse.

“Charles and Sir Richard seem to have got on admirably together,” was Elizabeth’s remark on the subject. “It would be, in fact, difficult

for Avesford's frank, honest nature to give offence; and I cordially hope, dearest sister, that for the rest of our lives, our families may remain on the happiest footing."

"God grant it!" exclaimed Lady Norman; "I have had more need of your affection, Bessy, than I have dared express.—Henceforward, though I may not *need*, I shall truly enjoy it."

To the whole party, Sir Richard Norman's parting greetings were kind and courteous. He spoke confidently to Avesford of a visit to Liverpool in the spring, and cheerfully assured old Maule that there was not the slightest chance of the Selwood family again quitting England.

"You see," observed the old gentleman, in extenuation of his pertinacity on the subject, "I bore but ill the thoughts of Matty's going abroad when you last left us.—But *now*, I can't make up my mind to have my only grandson cross the sea. I shouldn't be easy in heart to lose sight of little Walter!—"

Matilda felt ashamed to meet the looks of her husband, immediately after being compelled to

listen and reply to these misplaced expressions of tenderness.

“ We must console ourselves for the necessity of deceiving him, with the reflection that the boy is a source of unmixed delight to him,” was Lady Norman’s faintly uttered comment ; fancying from the depressed air of her husband, after the departure of their guests, that his conscience stood as deeply rebuked as her own.

But Norman’s thoughts were elsewhere. A far more painful blow had recently awaited him. On expressing to his cousin (or rather to Lady Catherine, his cousin’s stronger, as well as better half,) a determination to prosecute his claim to the Woodchurch peerage, he had been informed that, as it could only be conceded as a matter of favour, his proceedings would be injurious to others, without proving beneficial to himself ; and on his persisting, in spite of this warning, to give notice of an intended petition, he received a verbal intimation from Lady Catherine that she thanked him, at least, for taking

so much trouble about a title which, after all, was likely to descend to her son.

“*Your* life is as good as ours,” said she, infuriated out of all self-control on finding that Sir Richard was in possession of the documents necessary to secure the claim. “Enjoy it for your time, therefore, and welcome. But remember that (*unless Lady Norman should have a son*) it must eventually revert to *us*.—”

To this startling allusion, uttered from her carriage-window in presence of the servants, as she happened to encounter Sir Richard at Lady Dawlish’s door, he hazarded no reply. He dared not defy,—he dared not concede.—The slightest word or admission on the subject was fraught with peril. Hastening from the presence of the virago, he quitted town that night, to confer with Matilda as to the eligibility of putting forward pretensions, likely to draw down upon him such terrible retaliation.

“I was in hopes,” she replied, when Sir Richard laid the question before her, “that all misgivings had vanished from Lady Catherine’s mind!”

“The information accidentally afforded me this morning by Avesford, of Rupert Norman’s arrival in England and visit to Grove Park,” he replied, “convince me that she has obtained ulterior information. We are, perhaps, more than ever in peril !—”

“But what can Mr. Norman of Trieste know upon the subject more than herself?”

“No matter !—be satisfied that either from him or others, she has gained fatal intelligence !”

“But when Lady Audley learns from my sister with what enthusiastic affection the boy is loved amongst us ?”—observed Matilda.

“True !—The Avesford’s reports of your affection will surprise them. *That* is an advantage I had not contemplated !”—said Sir Richard. “But it comes too late. I fear they are already masters of the truth !” and he folded his arms over his bosom with a gesture and look of despair.

“In that case,” resumed Matilda, “on no account provoke them by claiming this unlucky peerage !—To what good purposé will it avail ? We are neither of us weak enough to have our vanity elated by a mere change of title.”

“Pardon me,” replied Norman; “aristocratic ennoblement is a distinction which few men contemplate with indifference. And even if philosophical on my own account, I am, I confess, ambitious for poor Walter.”

“You would not, surely, place in the scale against your own interests and credit, the future fortunes of an alien,—a being in whom we have no natural tie or kindred?”—cried Matilda, in amazement.

“Once for all,” rejoined Sir Richard, with one of his gloomy looks of former days, “know that I adhere to my original resolution concerning Walter Norman!—Once resolved on the adoption, I swore to love him as a father, and I have kept my word. Even had the boy turned out ill, he should still have claimed at my hands the portion of a son. But being as he is, a glorious creature endowed with every fair and excellent quality, I swear to you, that no child of yours and mine will ever be dearer to me than Walter!”

“Then I must tell you,” exclaimed Matilda, unable to silence the promptings of a mother’s

jealousy,—“that I think you do injustice both to them and *me* !—”

“God forbid,—my dearest wife !” replied he, with great feeling. “But we are not masters of our predilections ; and in all good faith I admit that rather than a hair of Walter’s head should be injured, I would renounce this peerage to the Normans.”

“If such be the worst excess into which your partiality is likely to betray you,” said Matilda, “Constance and I have little to complain of. Renounce for his sake a dukedom if you will,—and it will cause me no uneasiness. But let me not suppose your own trueborn offspring superseded in your affection by——”

“Not a word disparaging to Walter, I entreat you !”—interrupted Norman, with a look of anguish.

“You are too hasty,” was the gentle rejoinder of his wife. “I was going to say by one whom I truly and dearly love, except when I regard him as the successful rival of my child !—”

Relieved of one ground of anxiety by

Matilda's indifference to worldly distinctions, Norman resolved to renounce all active measures concerning the Woodchurch affair. It would be time enough to put in a protest, should Giles Norman hazard a petition.

Sir Richard soon found, however, that pretensions to peerages were not to be snatched up and laid down at the instigation of personal caprice. No secrecy having been enjoined on the subject in the first instance, Matilda, by way of extenuating her husband's prolonged stay in town, had mentioned to her friends at Farleigh Castle the motive of his delay; and the Earl (an old gentleman who had survived almost everything but adoration of his order, and a peculiar code of polity, whose table of precedence descended from the divinity straight to the anointed king of England, and from the anointed king of England straight to his peers,) was elated by the idea of so vast an addition to the social dignity of his neighbourhood. He respected Sir Richard Norman greatly as an old baronet, and felt that he should respect him fifty times more, as representative of one of the barons of Magna Charta

“Renounce the claim?”—cried the old lord, on learning from Norman’s lips his present determination. “That would be ‘letting I dare not wait upon I would’ most shamefully! Why, my daughter Emily understood from Lady Norman that you had obtained from the Herald’s Office the utmost encouragement and support?—”

“And so I did,” replied Sir Richard, calmly.

“Yet you would tamely sit down content to give up your pretensions?—Fie, fie! my dear Sir Richard!—I won’t believe it of you.—”

“The thing cannot be done without considerable trouble and expense,” argued Norman.

“And is it not worth trouble and expense, my dear Sir?—What trouble and expense do not people incur to secure even one of your brand-new patents; and yours would date, I fancy, from 1203!—God bless my soul!—I would expend half my fortune to establish my right to such a creation!—”

“It might be worth your Lordship’s while,” observed Sir Richard. “Your son is in Parliament, and will perhaps hereafter obtain the

lieutenancy of the county. Under such circumstances, I admit that an ancient English peerage is a better thing than an Irish earldom. But to a Roman Catholic like myself, earldoms or baronies are alike indifferent. I live on my own land, neither a courtier nor a politician. Precedence is immaterial in a career so obscure as mine. I *know* the validity of my claims ; and it is but an injustice the more on the part of the legislature, that I find myself excluded from my rightful place in the Upper House."

" Pardon me," said the old nobleman ; " but if you do not take the measures indispensable to establish your pretensions——"

" Do not, my dear lord, attempt to aggravate my political discontents by inspiring me with bootless ambition !" interrupted Sir Richard. " Let it suffice that I am restless and aspiring for my party ; for my own share, suffer me to retain my self-satisfied obscurity."

" I would rather reverse the case and see you an agitator on your own account than on that of the Catholics," replied the good old lord, with a smile. " On that score, my prejudices

are undiminished. Yet I cannot, in conscience, blame you for wishing to take an active part in the business of the country; since half my own time is spent in inciting my son to similar aspiration. How can we be surprised, I ask, at the growing influence of the democratic party in this country, when young men of family, having an important stake in the country, resign themselves, like Selsdon, to field-sports one-half the year, and sluggardry the other?"

"*We* are *not* surprised," replied Sir Richard. "*Our* hopes, as you are aware, derive daily strength from the growing influence of liberal opinions, the natural emanation of those middle classes whom I fear your Lordship is apt to designate as the democratic party."

"You do me injustice," replied Lord Farleigh; "and you are equally unjust towards yourself by affecting to take your place with the popular faction. Except on the single point of emancipation, *your* principles must necessarily be conservative. Nothing can be more absurd than to persist in ranging the political parties of this country under the two exploded banners of

whigism and toryism. The exigencies of the times and the march of society have created a hundred political sects. You might as accurately divide religious parties at the present day into Jews and Gentiles, as political, into whigs and tories."

"I so far agree with you," replied Norman, "that, though the whig party must ever hold the strongest claims on the gratitude of the present generation of Roman Catholics, yet, when half a century of civil equality shall have obliterated the rancour of religious animosities, it will probably be with the conservative party that the higher class of Roman Catholics are found amalgamated. A far-sighted tory leader, anticipating this, may perhaps be the person to break our chains, and enable the enfranchised to strengthen his own forces."

Lord Farleigh shrugged his shoulders. "I have ceased to indulge in political prognostications," said he. "The times are too strangely disordered to admit of deducing opinions from premises altogether unprecedented. The history of no other country affords a lesson from

which to frame the horoscope of England. Luckily, 'tis a good ship, which has weathered, and may still weather, many a storm. But I suspect there are Typhoons in the wind such as never before tried the strength of her canvass. As I daily assure my son, these are no times to slumber by the fireside. Those who love their country should be up and doing !—”

Sir Richard Norman, too wellbred to enter into political discussions with a man of Lord Farleigh's age, whose interests and opinions were diametrically opposed to his own, could not but call to mind that such were precisely the declarations he had heard a few days before, from the lips of Avesford, in a totally adverse sense. The Liverpool merchant, and the Worcestershire Magnat, were necessarily of opposite factions ; looking upon the state of parties, the one from the ascending, the other from the descending scale ; but both were equally aware that a power-engine was in established operation, to supersede the mouldy mill-wheels and lumbering looms of what are called the good old times. There existed, in fact, more sympathy

between *them* than between the conscientious conservatism of Lord Farleigh, and the narrow, though daring doctrines of high toryism, gabbled through the chattering mouth-piece of Lady Dawlish's set; or than between the enlightened liberalism of Avesford and the unargumentative radicalism of Cruttenden Maule, with its eternal cry of "I should like to know, now, within a million or two, what the house of Hanover has cost this country since its accession?"—or, "Radical reform, Sir!—Nothing short of the whole hog!—What's the use of keeping a country in petticoats, when it is old enough to be breeched?"

Had it not been for the ready attention of his daughter, who had attained the age when the noses of superannuated young ladies wax red after dinner and their conversation blue, Lord Farleigh would seldom have found an auditor for his political Jeremiads. But Lady Emily listened respectfully, and replied consolingly, to the remarks of a worthy old man grieved to leave the world at the commencement of a campaign of which he could not fore-

see the issue, and which he feared would prove disastrous to his posterity, even if beneficial to his country ; while Lord Selsdon “ voted politics a bore,” caring more for his stud and kennel than for the debates of both their houses.

Though a well-disposed young man, the future Earl of Farleigh presented a striking specimen of the evil results of an English education, as per custom established. Lord Selsdon, after spending eight years, and five thousand pounds, at Eton and Oxford, had learnt nothing but “ words, words, words !”—Drilled from form to form, through the routine of the classics, and having divided his time at the University between dissipation and Algebra, he was as ignorant as a ploughboy of the rudiments of available human knowledge. Superficial polish had been applied to the block ere it was carved into symmetry ;—and his mind now presented a misshapen mass, inscribed with the phrases of Greece and Rome, but devoid of the grace of scholarship, or the wisdom of philosophy. Nevertheless, as Lord Selsdon happened to fall short of libertinism, he passed for right-

worthy among those of his own degree; “an excellent creature;” “an estimable young man;” “a most domestic and exemplary nobleman.” Content to lead the life of the sloth and fatten on his own substance without regard for the leanness of his fellow-creatures, he gave fifty pounds at Christmas to the poor of his parish, by way of atonement for adding at nightly divisions his vote to the list of those who ground their bones for bread by maintaining crying and cruel abuses.

Lady Farleigh, who had exhorted the tutor of her only son to teach him “to live cleanly and like a gentleman,” eschewing all dangerous vices and vulgar errors; and who fancied that, in marrying him at an early age to an accomplished young lady of domestic habits she had secured his days to be long in the land and a comfort to her old age; little suspected his deficiency in the lofty virtues incumbent on his high estate as a maker of the laws,—a moulder of the times,—a guardian of the liberties of the nation. She appreciated not the errors of existing

systems as exemplified in her own family. She saw not that (unless the vulgar daring of sportsmanship be held a sufficient evidence of manliness) she had made an old woman of her son ; or that, by immuring the stately girlhood of her daughter from all chance of a marriage of inclination, she had thrown her riper years into the avocations of the opposite sex ; that Lady Emily should have been apportioned as Lord Selsdon, and Lord Selsdon as Lady Emily.

“How shall I like London?”—inquired Lady Selsdon of Matilda, when they met at Farleigh Castle, at a farewell party given previous to the annual break-up of the different families of the neighbourhood. “Selsdon’s return to parliament will be gazetted on Saturday. His uncle, who has been keeping his seat warm for him, would not hear of being troubled any longer, and Lord Farleigh insists upon our all going to town next week.”

“You will meet with a thousand things to gratify you,” replied Lady Norman, unwilling to damp the expectations of her young friend.

“ But poor mamma will find the spring so long !”—said Sophy, dolefully. “ Last year, she was constantly coming over to Tuxwell.”

“ Mrs. Ravenscroft did not surely expect that Lord Selsdon would become altogether a country gentleman ?—”

“ She knew that neither Selsdon nor I wished for anything beyond Tuxwell. We are all so happy there !—The air agrees so well with Louisa,—and Selsdon is so fond of his farm !—”

“ He will find new interests in his new duties,” argued Lady Norman.

“ He has not the least turn for politics !”—replied Sophy. “ But supposing he *were* to get bitten like the rest, what will become of *me* while he is passing day after day, and night after night, in the House of Commons ?—”

“ You have so many pursuits to occupy your time, my dear Sophia.”

“ Indeed, I have not !—Who can go on practising and drawing with no one to stimulate or applaud ?—I have given up all that sort of thing ; Selsdon does not like to find me engrossed by such nonsense.—He says, there is

something girlish and pitiful in mere accomplishments."

"You have the more leisure, then, for reading."

"Solitary reading makes one feel so lonely!—I seldom read, unless to Selsdon, when he wants to be kept awake after dinner."

"At all events," said Matilda, "in London you will soon be surrounded by family friends and new acquaintances, and make so many gay engagements!—"

"Selsdon detests balls and parties; and I shall have no courage or inclination to go out without him."

This was a position in which Matilda could particularly sympathize. "I have never passed what is called a season in town," said she, "but it strikes me that, without troubling yourself too much with the dissipations of the world——"

"Dearest Lady Norman, for mercy's sake do not encourage this sister of mine to become so mere a drone!"—interrupted Lady Emily, who sat impatiently by, listening to their conversation. "Sophy has a world of business on her

hands. She has not yet been presented; she has not yet been introduced to our numerous family connexions; she has done nothing;—she has everything to do. If Selsdon and Sophy had their own way, they would never stir from Tuxwell again, till they came to take possession of Farleigh Castle; nor ever stir from Farleigh Castle again, till they went to take possession of the family vault!—Is this the purpose of their existence?—Is the position of such a family as ours in society to be wholly lost?—Is its influence to melt away?—Is its next generation to turn out a race of rustics?—”

“Do not waste your eloquence, dear Emily, or make yourself uneasy,” cried the good-humoured Sophia. “Selsdon is preparing to obey his father’s commands and follow your advice with a good grace. A house is engaged for us. He has promised me the alternate weeks of an opera box; and Lady Farleigh is to present me at the first drawing-room.”

“Come, come!—this looks well,” cried Lady Emily. “Mrs. Ravenscroft has fulfilled her promise of interposing her good counsels.”

“Mamma seems to think it indispensable we should not pass another spring in the country,” sighed Sophy, mournfully. “She says we ought to see more of the world; as if anything we are likely to find there would make us happier than at Tuxwell.”

“It is disinterested on the part of Mrs. Ravenscroft,” observed Matilda.

“Poor, dear mamma!” moaned Lady Selsdon.

“We shall do our best to make her happy and cheerful during your absence,” said Lady Norman, kindly. “It is my duty to make up to *her*, when left alone, the kindness she formerly shewed me during my widowhood at the Manor.”

“How dull it used to be for you at the Manor in those days,” exclaimed Lady Selsdon. “How different you must find it *now* with the children to occupy your attention.”

“But they are not *old* enough yet to occupy her attention,” said Lady Emily, anxious to discourage her sister-in-law from sinking into a mere nursery dawdler. “They are at present

no companions for Lady Norman. Their education cannot have begun."

"Emily sees nothing in children but education blocks," cried Lady Selsdon, vexed at being thus sermonized. "My dear sister, you know no more about the companionableness of children, than *I* know about ship-building!—It is precisely because their education has *not* commenced that they *are* charming companions. An untaught child is a creature that has nothing to do but love its mother from morning till night. Your caresses are never importunate;—your proceedings are safe from criticism;—you are 'mamma,'—the second providence, (or, rather, the first, for beyond your care it knows at present nothing,) a person to be kissed, caressed, and captivated by all its little powers of coquetry.—All this, my dearest Emily, renders a child's company delightful; and all this vanishes the moment great A unfolds visions of birch-rods and dunces' caps.—"

"In *my* system of education," said Lady Emily, primly, "great A is no bugbear, nor do we hear mention of rods or foolscaps."

“Then, depend upon it, my dear, no Newton or Mrs. Trimmer will ever turn out from your school-room!” cried Lady Selsdon, provokingly. “Village children require thrice as much whipping as others. Poor old Dr. Lynch used to wear out a cane a quarter at Selwood, yet never pretended to teach anything beyond the catechism.”

“I wonder he ever taught *that* perforce of caning!”—cried Lady Emily, angrily; “and it was precisely because he taught *only* that, that he was compelled to have recourse to the ferraula.”

“Do try to make her understand the vast difference between a mother’s feelings and those of a schoolmistress,” exclaimed Sophy, appealing to Lady Norman. “Explain to her (you who have much longer experience than myself) the delights of a mother’s life. Tell her what you feel when your boy is racing before you in the garden, or jumping on your knee to be praised and caressed. Tell her what joy you have in all his movements—all his words—all his looks; how you delight to hang over him in

his sleep, or hail his waking. Tell her how sensible you are to his lightest touch—his faintest breath.—None but a mother, dear Lady Norman, can explain all this.”

But Matilda was silent. She knew not how to reply to such an appeal, with Walter as the exemplification.

“Speak to her for me,” persisted Sophy, taking the hand of her friend; “for so long as *I* attempt to describe my feelings, she does but accuse me of weakness. All, and more than all, I feel for my little Louisa, *you* have experienced for your beautiful Walter.”

“My dearest Sophy, feelings such as these, however natural, ought to be enjoyed with trembling. Make not to yourself an exclusive idol of your child, for at best it must be an idol of clay. What would become of you were anything to happen to Louisa?” inquired Lady Emily, sententiously. “Yet it is an event for which every parent ought to prepare her mind.”

“As if it were possible to *prepare* one’s mind

for such a calamity," cried the young mother, with indignation.

"Well, well; I hope to see you become more rational. In London, the company of men and women will perhaps inspire you with a taste for something beyond the nursery."

"‘She talks to us that never had a son,’" cried Lady Selsdon to Matilda, as her sister-in-law stalked majestically out of the room. "*We* experienced matrons are wiser in our generation. I will answer for it (*nicht wahr?*) that, at this very moment, you are dying to get back to Selwood and to Walter!—"

CHAPTER VIII.

Lui-même de n^{os} jours avait mêlé la trame,
Sa vie était ma vie,—et son âme mon âme.

LA MARTINE.

ONE of the most laborious parliamentary efforts of Lord Selsdon's maiden-session was, to defraud his Majesty's government of twenty pence per diem, by franking a letter from Sophy to Selwood Cottage, acquainting mamma with the progress of Miss Louisa's teething, and receiving to his address, in return, a letter from Selwood Cottage to Sophy, acquainting her with the state of her mamma's health, and the news of the village. There would appear, indeed, to be a peculiar charm in corresponding at the expense

of the nation ; for it may be observed that persons within ready reach of franks, write letters fifty times as often as those whose correspondence is to be had for money.

Selwood, meanwhile, afforded little variety to diversify Mrs. Ravenscroft's maternal counsels to her daughter about keeping the baby out of the way of infection, by never letting it mingle with the vulgar throng ; and securing herself from cold by means of a swansdown tippet.—The rectory was dull and dormousy as ever ; and during the absence of the Normans on the continent, only two accessions had occurred in the neighbourhood ; the establishment of some extensive iron-works at the old forge at Avonwell, and the conversion of a certain Scarwell Farm into Scarwell Park. An estate half way between the Manor and Farleigh Castle having been purchased by a retired upholsterer from Bath ; who, having expended fifty of his hundred thousand pounds in the purchase, and wasted thirty more in building a stuccoed castle on the spot and converting a pretty trout-stream into a sleepy lake, found it impossible to keep it up

on the interest of the remaining twenty. The estate was now, therefore, under the hammer of that remarkable professor of rhetoric, George Robins.

It was of the Normans, therefore, that Mrs. Ravenscroft was chiefly moved to write; and her letters contained, not only a gratifying account of Matilda's attentions to herself, but of the improvement of her young friend's domestic position.

"You would scarcely know Lady Norman!" wrote Mrs. Ravenscroft. "She has turned out as adoring a mother as we used formerly to think her an adoring wife. Her baby is always with her in the drawing-room when I call at the Manor, and accompanies her in all her drives and walks. Like yourself, my dearest Sophy, she seems to think a girl a prize worth a thousand boys; for I never noticed any of these violent demonstrations of tenderness towards Walter. Perhaps she considers the idolatry of Sir Richard enough to spoil him.

By the way, I consider the young heir of

Selwood is to be a prodigy ; for there is just arrived at the Manor a certain Mr. Manningham, to act as his tutor. Sir Richard speaks of him as an admirable scholar ; and Matilda speaks of him not at all,—from which I infer that he is as great a gêne to her as we used to fancy old O'Donnel. But she is too happy now with her little Constance to care much for old abbés ; and though I have never heard her make a remark to that effect, it must be a great comfort to know that their fine old place will descend to a son of her own. The fate of a dowager compelled to quit a spot she has passed years of her life in embellishing, to make room for strangers, has always appeared to me one of the hardest cases sanctioned by our laws."

Of the maternal partiality thus noticed by her worthy neighbour, Matilda was of course as little conscious as human beings usually are of their foibles. Her nature had been chilled in childhood by the want of a mother's love and by her father's absorption in business ; while the reserves created by difference of religion,

and the vexation arising from want of inheritors, had gradually estranged the warm affection which, for a time, concentrated all her own in Sir Richard Norman. From the moment of the fatal fault into which she had suffered herself to be betrayed, she had resigned her hopes of happiness as one unworthy the favour of Providence; and when, after all these trials and anxieties, she found herself at last a mother, and mother of a girl,—of a being whose birth conveyed no especial reproach to her partner in crime,—the floodgates of Matilda's heart were opened, and she loved as never mother loved before!—Lady Norman would have blushed had any rational being witnessed the extravagant caresses which, when alone, she lavished on her little nursling. She now discerned how pale and cold a copy of a mother's love had been her former sentiments for Walter!—She now saw what a feeling of insecurity had always mingled in her caresses of the adopted child!—Walter had appeared an unstable blessing; a creature who might be at any time claimed and estranged from them; a creature whom others had a right

to love better than herself. But her little fair smiling girl was all her own,—exclusively her own,—for life,—for death,—for eternity !—

If Matilda remained blind to her self-exposure in all this, Sir Richard was an observant spectator of her weakness. He now beheld unveiled the passionate depths of her soul. He saw how she could love ;—what lustre the excitement of this new feeling of maternal tenderness could lend to her eyes,—what sweetness to her tone,—what vigour to her step. She was at once softened and strengthened by her position as a mother.—She was more sensitive—more firm. On all points relating to Constance, she had a will and opinion of her own.

Sir Richard was half disposed to be jealous of his little girl ;—jealous for himself,—still more jealous for Walter. “ The poor boy was never cared for thus !”—he would say, on noticing some excess of maternal vigilance.—“ Every one must perceive the difference you make between your little girl and our boy !—”

Mortified at the expression which seemed to

disclaim on his own part all portion in his daughter, Matilda would not stoop to defend herself; and when he announced that his new chaplain was engaged to undertake the charge of Walter's education, Lady Norman renewed her offence, by expressing vehement satisfaction that Walter was to be placed under the hands of a tutor.

"I never doubted that you would be glad to get rid of him out of the nursery," angrily observed her husband.

"On the contrary, his little gambols amuse the baby. Nurse will be sorry to lose him," replied Matilda.

"I was not thinking of the nurse or the baby : —I was thinking of yourself!"

"I agree with you, then, that he is become too headstrong for petticoat government. When you were tracing, the other day, Lord Selsdon's unenergetic character to the bad system of his education, I could not help thinking it would be an advantage to Walter to have a rational companion ever at hand to answer his questions,

and lay the foundation for a good education hereafter."

"Engrossed as you are, I admit that you find very little time to increase his stock of information," observed Norman. "But you will be troubled with him no further. I have ordered apartments to be prepared for him and Ghita, next to the chaplain's rooms. They will form an establishment apart."

"Do you think it wise," demanded Matilda, startled by this arrangement, "to establish such complete disunion between the children?—"

"*You* were yourself the first to establish it. But give me leave to assure you, that the more marked your alienation from Walter, the greater will be the reparation urged by my conscience."

"My want of kindness and affection for the little fellow will impose no great tax upon your sense of justice!" was Lady Norman's mild reply. "But unable to instruct him in the principles of the faith he is destined to profess,

I rejoice that you should have found a tutor qualified for this important duty."

By this view of the case, the wrath of Sir Richard was appeased; nor could Matilda but triumph in the recollection of her father's recent remark, when caressing young Norman,—“Ay, ay, little man! Make as much as you will of me now.—No fear of the jaws of the young crocodile.—Till you get among the Jesuits and begin to spend your time in paternosters, you are of my own flesh and blood.—By and by, things may alter.—I won't answer for being half so fond of you, when you've been taught all the ugly lessons in store for the heir of Selwood!—”

“And *now*,” thought Lady Norman, “now that those lessons are beginning, my father will do involuntary justice to my child!—When we meet again, Constance will become his favourite; and as soon as she begins to notice him,—to speak,—to run about,—he will find that, instead of resembling the family portraits he dislikes so much, the little creature is the image of his once-loved Matilda.”

But while Mrs. Ravenscroft and others noted with satisfaction the increasing serenity of Lady Norman, and the happy change in her mode of life, Matilda noted with pain that her husband, though no longer surly with herself, was more subject than ever to starts of passion. The delight which, on his first return from the continent, he had taken in Walter, and in Selwood for Walter's sake, though keen and vivid as ever, was sometimes overcast with clouds that "came like shadows," but did not "so depart." They bequeathed a lasting injury to his constitution, and left a painful impression on the minds of those with whom he associated. The servants grew afraid of their master. The tenants were careful never to address him except through the medium of the steward. Even Mr. Manningham owed his security from hasty and groundless reproof, to the panoply of his sacred calling. There was not a creature in the neighbourhood but was conscious of the irritability which had formerly been visible only to the gentle Matilda.

Most of these occasional observers attri-

buted this disturbance of mind to deranged health. A few beheld in it only the violence of temper engendered by egotism, and fostered by indulgence; as among despotic monarchs the youthful libertine degenerates in middle age into a tyrant. But to Matilda's eyes, the veil was drawn aside. *She* saw the secret ulceration of his soul. *She* knew that he lived in a constant state of self-accusation, and (since the dark hints thrown out by Lady Catherine Norman) a constant dread of exposure; and felt convinced that it was by this one fixed idea her husband's mind was engrossed during those daily rides which he now chose should be solitary, and those prolonged and mysterious rambles, in which he contrived to evade her companionship.

There was nothing just then stirring in the country to divert his sickly fancies from himself. The meeting of parliament had carried off the Farleigh Castle party and the scanty remnant of their neighbours. Mrs. Ravenscroft he scouted as a pottering old woman,—the Lynches as a positive infliction; while the

minor objects appealing to his attention, were all more or less connected with the improvement of his estate or embellishment of his house, and consequently connected with the hazards of its inheritance.

“ If, after all,” said he, after one day inspecting, in company with Matilda, the laying of the foundation-stone of a fine suspension-bridge, connecting together the steep banks of a beautiful ravine in the park,—“ if, after all, this care and cost should avail only the offspring of those hateful people ;—if it should prove that ‘ for Banquo’s issue I have fil’d my mind !’—I know not, in fact, why I expend another thought or guinea on the place. I am convinced that Lady Catherine’s vague insinuations had a definite purpose. There was something maliciously exulting in her eye, when she said—‘ unless *Lady Norman* should have a son !’ ”

“ If you really imagine so,” said Matilda, incapable of suggesting the consolation of which she saw him so much in need, “ the things that ought least to occupy your regret are the time or money you are devoting to the embel-

lishment of the estate. The employment amuses your mind, and injures no one."

"*Injures* no one,—but may eventually benefit those whom I would willingly crush into dust!"—cried Sir Richard, compressing his lips, and knitting his brows.

"The discovery can never be effected during your lifetime," observed Matilda, scarcely knowing how to frame the commentary for which she saw he was waiting; "and such of your friends as may have the misfortune to survive you, would find in the exposure of the transaction a thousand deeper causes for affliction than waste of substance in favour of the Normans of Grove Park."

"Of *substance*!"—cried Sir Richard, with kindling eyes. "Do you suppose that my cares are pinned upon a few thousands more or less, abstracted from my daughter's fortune?—No, no! the thought that troubles me is, that they may perhaps obtain the enjoyment of this place, with which I, my life, and happiness, are so intimately connected that I scarcely recognise my existence apart from Selwood;—this place,

where I saw the light, and where my father and my father's fathers were born before me;—this place, where I used to adjourn, in my harassed, mortified boyhood, in welcome respites from the domestic tyranny of that blackguard, pettifogging banker;—that fellow who used to extinguish my spirit inch by inch,—drop by drop;—this place, to which I repaired in my dawn of manhood, on throwing off his damnable yoke,—for the first time free,—for the first time unconstrained;—this place, Matilda, this dear, dear spot, to which I brought my fair and gentle bride, and bade her rule thenceforward the destinies which I little dreamed would prove so stormy!—That so dear and intimate a possession should ever minister to the enjoyment of those whom through life I have abhorred, *drives* me to frenzy!—Shall I have laboured to make Selwood a terrestrial paradise for *them*—for *theirs*?—Is that room which you so delight in, to become the resort of the insolent, low-minded *intrigante*; Lady Catherine Norman?—Are my beautiful pictures, my exquisite sculptures, to fall to the share of Giles Norman,—a beast incapable of ap-

prehending the smallest of their beauties ;—that noble library, which poor O'Donnel devoted years of his valuable life to arrange and classify, till the toil silvered his head !—Think of those unenlightened dunces, inviting their idiotic crew to vent their jests upon its pedantic catalogues !—My father's picture,—my mother's,—the trees planted by their hands,—the ancient furniture rendered sacred by their favour,—are all these to be desecrated and ravaged by the hands of those Vandals ?—Matilda ! I have not patience to contemplate it !—I swear to you, that were I convinced of their being in possession of the intelligence of Walter's illegitimacy, the last act of my life should be to apply a torch to the old mansion, that I might die in the blessed conviction that its threshold could never be profaned by foot of theirs !”—

“ Even then, the *site* must fall to their possession,” faltered Lady Norman, shuddering at the idea that the irritated man before her was capable of accomplishing his terrible threat.

“ Ay !—they might build another Scarwell Castle on its smouldering remains,”—cried Nor-

man, with the look of a maniac. “ The woods, and waters, and spot of earth which I delight to call mine, must still be theirs ;—but as sure as the soul is immortal, Matilda, my spirit would haunt this desecrated spot !—The Normans should have no peace at Selwood.—I would sit with them by the fireside,—drink with them by the convivial board,—pray with them by the altar,—watch by their sleeping pillows,—scare them on their bed of death,—and be with them in terror and anguish for ever and ever !—”

Matilda paused and gasped for breath as the words of this frantic denunciation rang in her ears. She began to fear that Norman’s senses were forsaking him ;—*she began to tremble lest he should perceive she thought so.*—They were traversing the park together, and had just attained an open area commanding a fine view of the house, and commanded by it ; so that if any of the household chanced to be looking forth, his frantic gestures could not but attract their notice.

“ Look at it !”—cried he, stopping suddenly, and snatching Lady Norman’s arm under his,

while with his disengaged hand he pointed to the noble pile, every window of which was blazing with the reflected effulgence of the setting sun ; while the dim towers of Norman Castle, darkened by mantling ivy frowned in the background, contrasting with the vivid brilliancy of the inhabited mansion, like death with life. “ Look at that noble dwelling !—The whole kingdom affords nothing comparable with it in its peculiar majesty.—Artists and antiquarians admire and applaud it.—*I love it !—Matilda, it is mine !—It belonged to those to whom I belong.—It shall never be theirs who belong not to me !—*”

Lady Norman became now more than ever convinced of an aberration of intellect on the part of her unfortunate companion. The agitation and remorse of the last four years had evidently been too much for his reason. For if Giles Norman and his family were thus rejected as aliens, how much rather the foundling, in whose veins no drop of kindred blood was flowing !—

“ You do not look at it ; you are not inclined

to do justice to Selwood !”—cried Sir Richard, when he saw her eyes downcast to the earth, to avoid the glaring glances of his own.

“ In all our travels, I beheld no private residence comparable with it in dignity and beauty,” replied Matilda, striving to rally her spirits. “ But I would fain have you enjoy it while Heaven vouchsafes you the means of enjoyment, without entering too anxiously into what may chance when we are no more. It is not the fear of the discomfiture of our schemes, my dearest husband, which *ought* to render us uneasy. It is, the eye whose scrutiny we have never deceived, whose vigilance should be most terrible in our eyes.”

“ God judges us not as we judge each other !”—muttered Norman, in an incoherent manner. “ Man has invented laws to fetter and molest his fellow-man,—the law of the strong,—the law of the tyrant,—the law of the unjust. The means by which such are evaded, Matilda, are always lawful.”

“ I am no casuist,” replied Lady Norman, gently. “ I do not attempt to oppose my opinion

to yours on such points. But if you feel troubled in spirit, surely the advice of Mr. Manningham might——”

“Ha! you have undertaken, then, to *cant* me into confession!”—cried Norman, resuming his previous impetuosity. “To conciliate these Normans into according their protection to you and your daughter, you have undertaken to persuade me to give up my boy?”

“I have undertaken nothing, except to preserve inviolate my promises to yourself,” replied Matilda, firmly. “Do not make me repent them by this unreasonable violence. To Walter I have ever done, and shall continue to do, strict justice; and if I named as a desirable counsellor a member of your church, it was because I know the secrecy of the confessional to be as that of the grave.”

“My dear wife, you know nothing of these matters,” interrupted Sir Richard, subdued by her gentleness. “If my secret once found its way to the confessional, it is not betrayal I should have to fear, but sentence of restitution. Anything but that, Matilda,—anything but that!

What has been done, I would do again.—It is not remorse of conscience, it is dread of circumvention, that troubles my spirit. You have seen me set at naught the perils of the law to complete this act of fraud and forgery; and so far from trembling at my audacity, I would peril my eternal salvation could it in aught avail to seal the security of my attempt !—”

“ I cannot, and must not, listen to this !” cried Matilda, breaking from him, “ The chastisements of Heaven will fall upon you and yours, if you persist in cherishing these virulent and unchristian animosities.”

“ *Animosities !*” repeated Sir Richard, as they now advanced together towards the house. “ Alas ! my poor Matilda ! how little do you understand the feelings by which my conduct has been governed,—by which my views are still inspired.—If ever human error were excused by the tenderness of its motives, Heaven will have mercy upon mine.—But enough of this !—See ! the children come to meet us. Blessings on him !—Every day seems to develop his intelligence and beauty ; nature seems to delight

in rendering him worthy to become the heir of Selwood !—”

He turned towards his wife, in hopes to obtain an approving smile from Matilda. But already she had escaped from his presence and fled into the house, overcome by terror and emotion.

The post of the following morning brought a long letter from Avesford to Sir Richard, filled with common-place details of a mere matter of business ; but their very insignificance seemed acceptable to the perturbed spirit of Norman as a relief from the excitement of his thoughts. A consignment of antiquities and objects of art, purchased by him in Italy and shipped from Naples, had, owing to some informality, been seized the preceding year by the custom-house ; and during Sir Richard's recent stay in town, (having disdained the proffered interest of “ Lady Dawlish's set” to free them from the warehouse of bondage,) he had obtained no redress. But Avesford's good sense and knowledge of business proved successful. Empowered by Norman to petition in his behalf, he had

obtained an order for the packages, and now waited instructions respecting the mode of having them forwarded to Selwood Manor.

“ See how influential these mercantile people are becoming in this country !” cried Sir Richard, on acquainting Matilda with the contents of her brother-in-law’s letter. “ Avesford, you perceive, had only to speak and be attended to ; while I danced attendance in vain upon those rascally commissioners !—They knew me to be nobody,—not known upon ’Change—not known in the house. The landed gentry of England are thrust to the wall. Money, and parliamentary influence which is to be bought with money, are the law-makers of modern times !—Lady Catherine Norman’s interest would have obtained the Woodchurch peerage. Avesford, as a man known in the money market, has obtained my bas-reliefs and statues.—It is only the Roman-catholic Baronet who lives and dies a nonentity !—”

“ You would be very indignant did any other person call you a nonentity,” replied Matilda, with a smile.

“ Should I? I must be an egregious ass, then,—for it might prevent them using a more opprobrious word !”—cried Norman, with bitterness. “ When I am in my grave, how do I know that the whole exulting world will not be entitled to call me *knave*?—Look here, Matilda : this excellent fellow, Avesford, who would cut his right hand off rather than be guilty of a dirty action, signs himself mine with esteem—‘ Yours, my dear Sir Richard, with great esteem !’—A pretty object of *esteem* ; am I not, Matilda?—Some day or other, perhaps, you will be talking over my villainy together, when acting as my executors !—The secret which a man wastes his existence in preserving, is usually betrayed before he is cold in his grave. Of what are we masters in this world?—What do we control?—What can we secure?—Our property is the prey of laws which we abhor ; our conduct, the sport of minds which we despise. Who can presume to call himself master of himself?—”

“ We are *not* masters of ourselves, since we have an account to render to Him who hath in-

terdicted our oversolicitude for the things of this world !”—replied Matilda, earnestly.

“ Stay, stay, stay !”—cried Sir Richard, bursting into a frightful laugh, and starting up to ring the bell. “ If I must needs undergo a sermon, let Manningham be summoned at once. My chaplain is paid for his trouble. I never lend an ear to gratuitous homilies !”—

And Matilda, harassed and shocked, had only to take refuge in solitude from the frantic man, whom to deliver to the counsel of others, was to deliver to the judgment-seat !—

CHAPTER IX.

Quando più tra gli affanni altri si duole,
Par che dei cari suoi, più si rammenti;
E ben che sian lontani, il dolor suole
Con forte fantasia farli presenti.
Meditiamo gli affetti et le parole,
Onde ci renderian lievi i tormenti;
E con quei sensi in lor persona espressi,
Pensiamo a loro, e consoliam noi stessi!—

CARLO MAGGI.

LADY NORMAN rejoiced in the discovery that, in replying to Avesford's letter, her husband had complied with the request of his brother-in-law that he would name an early day for their visit to Liverpool. It was not change of scene alone to which she looked forward with hope. Matilda expected wonders from the tranquillizing influ-

ence of a sober and observant household ; where, conscious that his actions were under examination, the disturbed man would refrain from those ebullitions of feeling in which he indulged at home.—She calculated, and justly, that the presence of a person of whose esteem he was ambitious, would impose greater restraint upon his petulance than even the observation of what is called society.

But Lady Norman, thoroughly alive to the alarming state of her husband's feelings, looked further and deeper than the palliation of his immediate sufferings. Conscious of the deep-seated nature of the wound which she could not heal and must not presume to probe,—perceiving that the age and position of Mr. Manningham in the family was not such as to command respect from a man so careless as Sir Richard in the discharge of his religious duties,—she turned her thoughts towards the only living mortal she had ever seen exercise important influence over his character. Unaware how far the frailties she lamented had been produced by the artful indulgence of his preceptor, she recollected only that

she had seen the haughty spirit of her husband quail before the mild reproofs of the Abbé O'Donnel ; that in the height of his passion for herself, the priest had always been able to circumvent her influence ; and that, at the period of Sir Richard's exultation in France at the moment of Walter's adoption, it had needed only the arrival of the Abbé (reminding him that the son in whose birth he rejoiced was the son of a heretic) to reduce to silence and trembling his demonstrations of delight !—The Abbé, therefore, was of all men living the one most likely to bring his mind into a better frame ; and as Matilda dared not allude to the source of her uneasiness, her letter to the old priest contained only an earnest appeal to his feelings in favour of his former disciple.

“ If you have the least regard for Sir Richard,” said she, “ you will do violence to your inclinations, dear Sir, and once more visit Selwood. I am aware that, for years past, it has forfeited all favour in your sight. But I beseech you to dismiss from your recollection its protestant mistress and her offspring ; and remember only

him whose youth was trained by your care, and whose health and spirits have become alarmingly infirm. No living mortal but yourself possesses the least authority over Sir Richard Norman. Exercise it now for his sake and the sake of his children. Be with us as soon as circumstances will allow. We are setting off into Lancashire on a visit that will not detain us beyond a fortnight; and on our return I trust to find you established under our roof.—Do not, I implore you, neglect this earnest invitation.—”

Comforted in spirit after the despatch of this letter, Matilda prepared for their journey to Liverpool. Sir Richard seemed pleased with the idea of the expedition, and was gratified by Matilda's eager negative when he proposed leaving Walter and the tutor behind at the Manor.

“Consider how strange it would appear to the Avesfords, and what disappointment it would occasion in the family!” cried she; and Mrs. Ravenscroft, who at that moment entered the room to bring her daily report of the Seldons and Farleighs, warmly seconded Lady

Norman's assertion, that the sea air would be advantageous to the child's health, and the novelty of the scene both profitable and pleasant to his young mind.

Apprehensive that the old lady, if left to enlarge upon her arguments, might weaken them with much prose, Lady Norman directed her attention from Liverpool by inquiries concerning London.

"After all our fears, then," she observed, "Sophy is growing as great a rake as the rest of the world!—The season not begun; yet you see she talks of engagements without end!—"

"Poor dear girl! it is very considerate of her (knowing how anxious I am on her account) to make all these efforts to amuse herself," replied Mrs. Ravenscroft. "Sophy, like her poor father, is the most domestic creature on earth—(all sailors are domestic; give them a cheerful fireside, and they have not an ambition beyond it. I am sure Admiral Guerchant must have told you, my dear Lady Norman, that a quiet, comfortable evening at home with his family was the only thing poor Ravenscroft

found worth living for.) And in the same way, Sophia would willingly retain in town her jog-trot, humdrum ways and habits of Tuxwell Park.—But the Farleighs very properly and naturally desire some sort of family connexion to be kept up by their son.—They are vastly proud, too, of Sophy's beauty and accomplishments. (I must do them the justice to say, that they are as proud as I could be myself of Sophy's beauty and accomplishments.) And so you see, instead of allowing her to stay moping at home evening after evening, while Selsdon is away at the House, Lady Farleigh requested her niece, Lady Arthur D——, to introduce my daughter into the best society. Sophia is actually the rage in what is called Lady Dawlish's set!—It is astonishing how kind Lady Arthur has been in getting her invited everywhere. Lady Dawlish herself, it seems, is a very amiable, pleasing woman; and her son, Colonel Villiers, my daughter writes me word, is as attentive and careful of her as if she were his own sister. Night after night, he gets up her carriage and cloaks her, and attends

her, because he knows Selsdon to be elsewhere engaged, and unable to look after her ; and, of course, it is very pleasant for an inexperienced young woman like Sophia to feel that she is not thrown upon the protection of utter strangers.”

“ Good heavens !” ejaculated Matilda, incautiously, “ has my poor Sophia already fallen into the hands of that set !—”

“ Indeed she has ; and I am assured, that it is not every one who would have been so fortunate during her first season in town. I fancy, my dear Lady Norman, that she is partly indebted for her welcome among them to *your* kind recommendation. Sir Richard’s charming cousin, Lady Catherine, was among the first to take her up ; and Sophy says, they are quite inseparable. They meet daily, and daily talk of their mutual friends at Selwood. Lady Catherine has taken Selsdon in hand. She says the cubs of the tory party belong to her—that she is obliged to drill them into shape ; and Sophia declares it is amazing how much influence Lady

Catherine has already acquired over her protégé. She makes him go to Almacks every Wednesday, and the Opera every Saturday, (to which Sophy could never persuade him.) Lady Catherine protests, that it is part of a member's duty to shew on holiday nights how much he stands in need of recreation."

"Lord Selsdon, too!"—exclaimed Matilda, amazed that Mrs. Ravenscroft, whom, in her own inexperienced days she had been accustomed to regard as so much a woman of the world, should be blind to the dangers awaiting her daughter and son-in-law; without considering how little analogy exists between the wholesome order of society formerly frequented by the Captain's wife, and the horde of civilizarians surrounding Lady Selsdon.

Three days afterwards, they were at Liverpool, installed in the roomy, cheerful habitation of the Avesfords. Lady Norman was surprised to find it a relief to the spirits to remove from the tranquil seclusion of such a spot as Selwood Manor, to the busy hum of a com-

mercial city. It was not so much the novelty and tumult of the scene which diverted her mind, as the spectacle of happy multitudes engaged in active pursuits, and opposing a reproachful contrast to the discontents of the luxurious owners of Selwood Manor, passing their selfish lives in nursing into monstrosity an evil of their own creation.

“Don’t talk to me of low spirits!”—said Avesford to his sister-in-law, after conducting her over the Asylum for the Blind. “Consider the unfortunates you have this day beheld, peaceful and patient under their heavy deprivation; and then tell me whether there is pardon in heaven for the murmurs of those on whom Providence has showered its choicest blessings, and who presume to be unthankful.”

“There may be embittering circumstances in a seemingly-prosperous destiny, undreamed of by the world,” faltered Matilda.

“Ay, ay!—such is ever the cry of your nervous hypochondriacs who eat and drink so well that they digest ill,—and fancy themselves un-

happy," cried Avesford. "A fortnight's starvation, and stone-breaking on the high road, would cure the worst case among you,—from Byron to Sir Richard Norman!—You assure me your husband is naturally of a depressed turn of mind.—Nonsense! no man is *born* of a desponding turn.—The evil is, one way or other, of our own creation.—Sir Richard has had the imaginary misfortune to experience no *real* misfortune since he supped his first earthly mouthful from a golden pap-boat.—Residing chiefly on his own estate, monarch, or at least viceroy, of all he surveys, his mind has contracted the rust of egotism. The snail in its shell is not more limited in its views of life than a man of liberal fortune who estranges himself from contact with society. There is nothing for the cure of such ailments as Sir Richard's, but the rough encounter of cities and civilization. By finding himself of so much consequence to those around him, he has become of too much consequence to himself. He wants at once rousing and depressing. Pardon me if I speak thus

freely; but you have addressed me frankly on the subject, and I give you my frank opinion in return."

"And truly do I thank you for it!" replied Matilda. "But Sir Richard's peculiar position——"

"No man has a peculiar position," cried Avesford, stoutly. "Our great error lies in thinking so. We are all alike mites, labouring towards the same great end. Some of us are consequential mites, and choose to strut in armour; while others are content to creep or bustle on *in naturalibus*. Neither in our own eyes, or those of each other, however, have we a right to assume more than mitehood. It is in the sight of One greater than ourselves that we may become of higher account, by admitting ourselves to be mites but acting like men."

"Would that I dare entreat you to talk in this style to Sir Richard!"—sighed Matilda.

"I talk in this style to *you*, my dear sister, as to a person enjoying moral health," replied Avesford. "With an ailing spirit, I might deal more tenderly; but still without admitting that

I detected its ailment. Yesterday, for instance, among the party of happy-hearted, strong-minded men who dined with me, not one of course suspected the peculiarities of Sir Richard, or attempted to accommodate his modes of thinking to those of a stranger who was no more than any other guest at my board.—What was the result?—That the hypochondriac was drawn out of himself,—that he felt it necessary to rally his powers of mind to place himself on a level with those with whom he was accidentally associating, and to whom he could give no higher proof of his importance, than evidence of faculties and principles equal in spirit and honour to their own.—Admit that last night he retired to rest in better spirits than usual?—”

“ For a single evening, the most determined hypochondriac will sometimes rally.”

“ Renew the occasion, and the improvement will be as often renewed. Sir Richard should pass a portion of every year in town. Because the legislature rejects his services, human nature does not reject them. There are learned and humane associations ever in operation, possessing

claims on the time and talents of all wealthy and enlightened men, and double claims on the time of those unembarrassed by peremptory occupation. Members of parliament, professional men, merchants, or bankers, are too often pressed into a service which belongs of right to those who enjoy leisure as well as opulence. Persuade Sir Richard Norman of this;—persuade him that the library at Selwood is not the universe,—that the interests of the world elsewhere are worth forwarding, and its esteem worth obtaining,—and you will achieve a conquest greater far than when Matilda Maule first won the heart and hand of the owner of Selwood Manor !—”

“ I must leave the lesson in your abler hands,” replied Lady Norman with a sigh. “ A wife is the last preceptor by whom a man likes to be admonished !”

“ Don’t say that !”—interrupted Avesford, as the pony carriage stopped at his own door. “ Some men delight in petticoat government. Ask Elizabeth whether I am not an amenable animal in domestic life. She forbid me, for

instance, this morning, to invite the Audleys to my house during your stay; and without inquiring the motive of her interdiction, I promised obedience."

"The motive," replied Lady Norman, with a smile, "you deserve to know, in requital of your good advice. I requested my sister to defer her invitations till after our departure; having reason to believe that Norman's desire to avoid making his cousin's acquaintance, was the sole cause of his repugnance to visit you at Fern Hill."

"Your explanation consigns me to confusion worse confounded!"—cried Avesford, shrugging his shoulders. "But into other people's motives I rarely trouble myself with inquiries. Suffice it if I understand my own, and those of my wife."

Sir Richard, meanwhile, soon found his reserve subdued by the frank good-humour with which his brother-in-law did the honour of his native city, exhibiting its fine monuments with pride, but without exaggerating their importance.

"We do not ask experienced travellers like

yourselves to think much of us," said he, to the Normans. "But we know our own value. We are able to note to a figure the increase of our capital and population. For our public monuments and institutions, we are not indebted to kingly favour, or the caprice of a royal concubine. All you behold around us is the fruit of honest and unassisted industry.—Can your Florences and Milans say as much for themselves?—"

To little Walter, on the other hand, Avesford had the gratification of displaying the wonders of a vessel of five hundred tons, launched two years previously by himself, and now returning from a first voyage to the East; and of conducting him over one of those American "carracks," those dandies of the ocean which display such rich adornments, that Europeans are tempted to fancy that the boors described by Mrs. Trollope must regard elegance as a transportable offence, and banish it from their cities beyond the high seas.

In the houses of Avesford's friends and connexions, meanwhile, to which he was hospitably

welcomed, Sir Richard was surprised to find interesting collections and valuable works of art, prized as highly by the owners as the heirlooms of Selwood by himself; *more* highly, indeed, than he had found objects of similar interest in Italy, where they are now chiefly noticed as marketable commodities.

“ You are as much startled, I perceive, at discovering a fine black-letter library under the roof of my uncle John, the West-India merchant,” said Avesford, “ as at finding crystal and porcelain, inlaid woods and silken hangings, in the cabin of a New-York merchantman. You have hitherto judged us, I see, by your experience of the Wicksets and Cruttendens; but as John Maule informed you, my dear Sir Richard, we are proud people—proud of our connexion with such names as Roscoe and Canning.—Even Manchester, which strangers call our sister, we look down upon as a country-cousin; and as to Birmingham—but I will not affront Bessy, who, I perceive, is pouting at me already.”

Avesford's exultation in favour of his thriv-

ing birth-place was warmly echoed by the Normans. Sir Richard was vexed only that his brother-in-law's friend, the American Consul, and other dignitaries of the place, would not allow him a moment's respite from the beauties of Fern Hill. Avesford, familiarized with the superior dignities of Selwood, was wise enough to know that Sir Richard might return in peace to Worcestershire, without having admired the growth of his shrubberies, or the oriental stucco of his banqueting-room. But Fern Hill was a sort of Tusculum,—a chartered show-place,—in its humble neighbourhood; and Norman began to fear that the innumerable queries and comments, with which he was assailed on the subject, must end in a request on his part to be driven some morning towards Birkenhead, in the neighbourhood of which the villa was situated. But from this humiliation, he was spared by the tact of the Avesfords; and the period arrived for his return home, without his having experienced an uneasy moment during the visit. Sir Richard had been kept in spirits by the boyish raptures of Walter at all he saw and heard;

while Matilda enjoyed the renovated spirits of her husband.

“ That he could be ever thus !”—thought she, as she saw him take the arm of his brother-in-law, and set off with elastic step towards the Exchange, or to read the papers of the day. “ Here, how easy it seems to amuse him ;—he, who used so to detest the name of trade, and to declare that, from the sale of Joseph by his brethren, all human bargains consist in knavery on one side, and dupery on the other !—”

She did not perceive that the very incongruity of the place with his former experience and opinions, constituted its charm in his eyes ; and that the contrast of the bustling quays with his silent study at Selwood, was as admirable to *him*, as his own stately person and graceful manners proved to the solid, but plain and inelegant individuals with whom he was consorting.

“ Prepare yourself for a grand exhibition to-day at my friend Wainewright’s dinner,” observed Avesford, as the Normans were preparing to proceed to the hospitable roof of the gentle-

man whose aid had been instrumental in the recovery of Sir Richard's Italian treasures; and with whom, during his stay in Liverpool, he had formed a pleasant acquaintance. "Wainewright is a capital fellow. But he is unfortunately our ex-mayor; and mayoralties, like the measles, are often fatal in the rudiments of disease they leave behind. Wainewright has never recovered from his mayoralty."

"It is, at least, not an infectious disorder," said Sir Richard. "We may enjoy your friend's turtle without fear of the result."

"If he required us to enjoy only his turtle. But Wainewright chooses his guests to enjoy his service of plate; and what living mortal cares for the service of plate of any other man?—"

"I care very much for the Cellini he shewed us the other morning," observed Sir Richard.

"Certainly. But Wainewright is more engrossed by his Rockingham dessert service or engraved champagne glasses, which any one may have for money. We are not impec-

cable, even in Liverpool," continued Avesford, sportively. "There occurred a royal visit during Wainewright's mayoralty, which, unluckily, inoculated him with a taste for courtiership. He has warmed at the sight of a lord from that day to this; and I am sorry to announce that you are indebted for this day's banquet, rather to your social position, than to the pleasantness of your conversation, or power of appreciating a chef-d'œuvre of Cellini."

The projected journey of the following morning having disorganized their arrangement, the Normans, contrary to their custom, were late; and Mr. Wainewright's drawing-rooms were filled with strangers, when they arrived. The dinner, which was announced before they could take a survey of the company, verified Avesford's declaration that it would prove vanity and ostentation. The party nearly doubled the amount of guests which any but a crowned head can entertain with comfort; and the double dozen was accordingly condemned to

a hot room and a cold dinner ; turtle with the chill taken off, and lime-punch just warmed through.

Sir Richard, however, was no epicure, and had sat at too many good men's feasts in his time to recoil from one of moderate excellence. Seated beside the lady of the house, he had on his left hand a fine-looking woman whose name he did not hear ; but whose title was speedily pointed out by the ardour with which Mrs. Wainewright demanded, " which soup her Ladyship would take?"—Her Ladyship, however, seemed inclined to take nothing, except inordinate notice of Sir Richard Norman ; and with that susceptibility to attention common to his sex, he soon made up his mind in return, that his fair neighbour was as intelligent as she was handsome. They entered into free discussion of England and the continent ; and Norman was beginning to experience some surprise at the accurate knowledge of his position and pursuits implied by the remarks of his companion, when she suddenly observed with a smile, " I am inclined to fear that Sir Richard Norman does not know me.

Surely you cannot have forgotten your cousin Agatha?—”

The agitated start of the Baronet replied better than words; and instantly glancing towards Matilda, he discerned from the air of sympathy with which she sat regarding him, that she had already discovered into whose unwelcome presence they had been betrayed.

Unaware of any family connexion between the parties, Mr. Wainewright had mayorishly considered that a Roman-catholic baronet was exactly the person to be invited to meet a Roman-catholic baronet; and in so doing, had gratified the eager curiosity of the harsh and masculine Lady Audley. For Avesford had afforded singular attestation to his assertion that “Liverpool people are not infallible,” by defining Lady Audley as a “high-minded” woman. The sentiment he mistook for high-mindedness was merely *hauteur*. Throughout the category of human frailties, pride is, perhaps, the one least likely to be understood at a place such as Liverpool. Lady Audley was, in fact, as proud as a peacock of her Normanship. Though married

to a man of descent equally honourable, pride of birth,—pride of self,—pride of family,—predominated in her mind. She had not yet forgiven Sir Richard's refusal to elevate her to the head of the clan which she regarded with such infatuated partiality.

Piqued into a determination to prove to her contemptuous cousin that it was in her power to form an alliance more eligible than the one he denied her, Agatha Norman had remained single till her father's death, by doubling her portion, tempted Sir Thomas Audley to repair his family-seat at her expense ; affording her in exchange the long-coveted dignity of precedence as a baronet's wife.

But Lady Audley was no improvement upon Agatha Norman in anything but title. Her naturally good abilities were invalidated by inordinate self-esteem. Though really a handsome woman, a certain sarcastic dryness of manner derived from her father, had prevented even her youth from appearing young ; and now, at four and thirty, she passed for a middle-aged woman !—There was no pleasant

weakness in the nature of the lady of Audley Oaks. She disliked such trivialities as children, poetry, flowers, or needlework. Her genius soared above the trash of novels; but she was a mathematician, a metaphysician, and divers other icians; not a *musician*, however; for of that gentle art she cared only for thorough bass; and to the wonder of the Wainewrights and their kind, she could out-argue the mayor and corporation in political economy. In the neighbourhood of Audley Oaks, as formerly in that of Grove Park, she was revered by the elderlies as a very superior woman, the best whistplayer in the county; but it was observed that the moment Miss Norman, or Lady Audley, walked into a room, the *young* people spontaneously retired to the room adjoining.

Aware of the connexion by marriage between her country neighbours the Avesfords and the Selwood family, Lady Audley was surprised that she had not been invited to meet them during their sojourn in Liverpool. Residing within three miles of the city, and accustomed from her youth to mercantile society, she was

at all times glad to escape from the tediousness of the dullest house and dullest husband in the kingdom, to cheerful dinner-society where she had the satisfaction of wrangling with the men in authority, and taking precedence of their wives; and when the expiration of the Normans' visit convinced her that Avesford had expressly avoided bringing them together, she settled it to her satisfaction, that Sir Richard Norman had demanded the sacrifice, from unwillingness to hazard comparison between his handsome, high-bred cousin, and the homely sister of the unpretending Elizabeth Avesford.

The beauty and refined elegance of Lady Norman proved consequently a severe blow to her rival. Matilda's natural grace, though polished by the ease of continental society, remained undeteriorated by the affectations of London fashion; and Agatha was forced to admit, that it was not mere ignorance which had induced the Liverpool dames to report Mrs. Avesford's sister as unrivalled in beauty and deportment. She could only console herself by labouring to espy a fault!—The soft, mild, submissive brow

of Matilda, was far below the level of the true Norman spirit, which she beheld enthroned in all its harsh and arrogant altitude, upon the handsome brow of Sir Richard.

For to her, his very defects were attractive.—The proud, shy boy, in whom her girlhood had delighted, was now the haughty, reserved man,—the type of all she had dreamed of in her projects of wedded happiness. Such was the husband with whom she would fain have studied abtruse divinity, emblazoned genealogies, and cavilled evening after evening in metaphysical disquisition;—living and dying within compass of their park wall;—and performing their daily orisons apart from the vulgar throng, in the very chapel where their Normanized dust would eventually be secured from amalgamation with plebeian clay!—She felt, and perhaps justly, that *her* iron nature was more congenial with *his* than the golden ductility of Matilda. And when from the contemplation of Sir Richard's distinguished air and features, stern as an effigy of the middle ages, she turned towards the unmeaning face and diminutive person of Sir

Thomas Audley who sat hemming and hawing his common-place platitudes into the ear of the patient Lady Norman, it was impossible to repress the consciousness that her scornful cousin had the best of it.

On another point, again, she was forced to confess inferiority. Long had it afforded satisfaction to her spinster fretfulness, that her brother remained sole heir to the dignities of Selwood Manor and Norman Castle; and the birth of Walter was as severe a mortification to herself as to Lady Catherine. With her sister-in-law indeed, who at that time resided with the family at Grove Park, she was as much at variance as might have been anticipated from the collision of tempers so arbitrary; yet it was not the less a grievance to find her family excluded from their long-expected inheritance, by a child of the manufacturer's daughter.

Such was the feeling which had produced those anxious inquiries of the Avesfords concerning little Walter, attributed by Sir Richard to suspicions which had never entered the mind of his

cousin :—the assertions of Lady Catherine, respecting the supposititious birth of the heir of Selwood, having been treated by Lady Audley as the delusions of a disappointed woman ; while her brother Rupert and Madame Norman affected total ignorance of the proceedings of their kinsman while on the continent.

Clouds darkened therefore the mind of Lady Audley when, after dinner, she requested from Mrs. Avesford an introduction to her sister. But she had not conversed half an hour with Matilda before they disappeared. The softness of Lady Norman's manners, which most people found so ingratiating, excited in Agatha a sentiment of contemptuous pity. When Matilda talked with varying colour and sparkling eyes of her baby, and listened with unconcealed delight to a ballad having nothing but pathos and simplicity to recommend it to which the youthful voice of one of Mrs. Wainewright's daughters was lending peculiar charm, Lady Audley admitted that such a woman was unworthy to be the object of a good, stern, solid

hatred. As well acquire from a Sabbath of Lapland witches a gale capable of rending asunder a mainsail,—merely to reduce to rags a paltry shred of cambric !—

Taking her seat beside the vapid wife of her cousin, she accordingly oppressed Matilda with the weight of her patronage; and Sir Richard had the satisfaction of finding her under cross-examination by the shrewd sister of Giles Norman, touching Walter's age, disposition, and resemblance to the Norman family; her voice faltering, and her colour rising to crimson, as she replied to the comprehensive interrogatory. Forewarned by Norman's susceptibility that the attention of Lady Audley was likely to be on the alert upon this critical subject, Matilda fancied herself submitted to a premeditated scrutiny; while Sir Richard was convinced that the trembler must inevitably betray herself and him :—"Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all !"

Little did poor Mrs. Wainewright imagine, as she ambled round her showy drawing-room with a pack of cards in her hand, recruiting for Lady

Audley's rubber, what anguish of spirit was entralling two of her distinguished guests;—thanks to her notion, that a baronet could not eat his dinner in comfort unless matched with a baronet;—as if guests, like saltcellars, were to be assorted according to pattern !

CHAPTER X.

He dies, and makes no sign !—Oh ! God forgive him.

SHAKSPEARE.

BUT for this unlucky encounter, unmixed would have been the regret of the Normans on entering their travelling carriage the following day. The frank cordiality of Elizabeth had confirmed into affection the instinctive love of her sister ; while the sterling sense and manliness of Avesford had conquered the more fastidious esteem of her husband. Sir Richard felt roused and improved by his visit to these excellent people. The Society in which he was compelled to work to maintain his place, produced a far different effect upon his mind

from the listless, superficial nothingness of the London world; where to trifle well is the utmost aim of conversation, and where it is as much a proof of good breeding to discard all intellect from your discourse, as gold lace and embroidery from your coat.

At the moment of departure, little Walter demanded from his uncle and aunt a promise to visit Selwood in the course of the summer; while Matilda, embracing her sister with tears in her eyes, exacted a confirmation of the engagement.

“Now you have discovered that there is nothing very tremendous about my neighbours, the Audleys,” whispered Mrs. Avesford, in reply, “I trust it will not be long before you extend your visit to Fern Hill and bring me your little girl. The children would be better for sea-bathing, of which we are within reach at Birkenhead.”

“Would that we resided nearer together!” murmured Lady Norman, the depression of whose spirits was renewed at the prospect of returning to Selwood.

“ A day’s journey is surely no alarming distance ?”—observed Elizabeth. “ If you were ill, or anything went wrong at Selwood (now there is no Tom Cruttenden to interfere), I should be with you immediately !—”

Matilda sighed heavily in reply ; for an apprehension of “ things going wrong ” hung perpetually upon her spirits.—But contrarieties of the nature she anticipated could, alas ! derive no solace from the society of her sister.—

“ Farewell,” said she, clasping Mrs. Avesford’s hand, and springing into the carriage ; while Avesford, after exchanging his last few words with his brother-in-law, bade them cheerfully adieu, and stood predicting fine weather and a pleasant journey. The travellers were to diversify their road homewards by sleeping at Chester, and visiting several celebrated points of scenery in North Wales ; and Elizabeth and her husband, as they saw them depart, could scarcely refrain from a sigh that Avesford’s avocations prevented them from accompanying their friends so far on their journey.

“ There go two human beings, one of whom

is *less* spoiled by the world, and the other *more*, than any it has been my lot to encounter," cried Avesford to his wife as the carriage rolled off.—

"Lady Norman, in spite of fate and flattery, remains all that is best and fairest in women. That sister of yours, dear Bessy, has the mildness and serenity of a saint!—"

"Faculties which, I fear, have been severely tried," observed Elizabeth. "There breaks out occasionally a vein of sadness in Matilda, wholly at variance with her position and character."

"I do not altogether understand either her or her husband," was Avesford's thoughtful reply. "My plumb-line is usually deep enough for most human characters; but there is a point in theirs which I am unable to fathom. Norman has a way of starting at straws, which implies a more deep-seated grief or remorse than is compatible with the sunshiny existence he has enjoyed."

"The result of morbid sensibility,"—suggested Elizabeth.

"A sensitive spot denotes a previous wound

—a foregone conclusion,” replied her husband, and immured as he has been at Selwood Manor, how can he have endured any deep affliction? —No, no ; like other spoiled children of fortune, Norman is sick of too many sweets. He wants some right earnest misfortune to bring him to his senses.”

“ For Matilda’s sake, God avert it !”—cried Elizabeth, fervently.

“ For his and her own. I would fain see his fine talents developed, and his petulance corrected, before it be too late,” replied her husband. “ Though far from the overbearing brute he was described to me by your brother Crutt and old Tom, Sir Richard Norman becomes occasionally an imperious, disagreeable companion ; and I prize his generous, honourable nature too highly not to wish him to become of real value in the world. *That* man was meant for something better than a clod. But he has been pampered into most unchristian selfishness. It is only by suffering persecution now and then, that these great ones learn mercy !—”

This severe sentence recurred painfully to the recollection of Elizabeth when, in the dead of the following night, they were called from their beds to peruse a letter from Matilda, forwarded by express, and written in indescribable anguish of spirit. The lightly-spoken denunciation of Avesford was already fulfilled. Sir Richard Norman was lying in a desperate state, at an obscure inn at Chirk. Precipitated from the box of his carriage by a frightful overturn produced by runaway horses, it was announced by the medical practitioners of the place, that nothing but the amputation of his crushed and fractured thigh was likely to preserve his life—even then in the greatest jeopardy; and Lady Norman entreated her brother-in-law to bring with him to the spot, without delay, the most eminent surgeons of Liverpool.

“Lose not a moment in rejoining us,” said the scarcely intelligible handwriting of Matilda; “and if my sister loves me, she will bear you company.”

Elizabeth *did* love her; and grieved in soul at the recollection of the harsh comments in

which she had indulged the preceding day at the expense of the sufferer, could scarcely find words to reply to her husband as they took their hasty way towards those from whom they had so recently parted in all the exultation of prosperity. From the accounts extracted by Avesford from Matilda's messenger, it appeared that, in descending the hill from Chirk towards Llangollen, the horses, alarmed by a sudden outbreak of flame from a neighbouring limekiln, had started off at speed; and that Sir Richard, who sat with his son upon the barouche box, was thrown by the concussion under the carriage, while the shock lodged the lighter frame of the child, without injury, upon the grassy banks above the road. Mr. —, the surgeon by whom they were accompanied, on learning the nature of the contusions and fractures sustained by his patient, shook his head; sickening the very heart of Elizabeth by his dissertation on amputations and mortifications, and all the evils awaiting the unhappy patient.

By noon on the following day, the surgeon

was able to form his own conclusions. On a miserable bed “of the worst inn’s worst room,” lay extended the mangled frame of the haughty proprietor of Selwood Manor; while a single glance betrayed to Avesford Mr. ——’s opinion that his journey might have been spared,—his aid being wholly unavailing to the dying man. But the ecstasy with which their arrival was hailed by Lady Norman (whose eyes had been for fifteen hours fixed upon the tortures of her husband), implied a far different impression.

“ Blessings upon you for coming !”—cried she, seizing Avesford’s hand. “ If you could but conceive what the suspense has been both to him and me !—If you could but imagine what torments he has endured, and with what fortitude !—”

“ *I can* imagine,” replied Avesford, withdrawing his tearful eyes from a face already scarcely recognisable, and moistened with the dews of death; and he whispered his request to Elizabeth to withdraw her sister from the room, who, believing that the operation, which she supposed was about to take place, constituted her

husband's only chance of preservation, imprinted a kiss upon the cheek of the sufferer, and departed without a word.

“Are they gone?”—immediately demanded Sir Richard, in a hoarse voice. “Then secure the door, my dear Avesford, and assist this gentleman to expose to Mr. —— the injury I have received.”

Avesford's stout heart quailed on witnessing the excruciating sufferings inflicted by the mere examination upon his brother-in-law. But not a murmur escaped the livid lips of Sir Richard, though a deep groan burst irrepressibly from his own as he recognised the convulsive pressure of the patient's hand. The deep silence that ensued was broken by his faint voice addressing Mr. ——.

“You agree with me, Sir (I read it in your looks),” said Sir Richard, “that your art can do nothing more than alleviate my sufferings?—Fear not to acquaint me with the worst!—I am convinced that the shock my constitution has received must be fatal; but should you entertain

an opinion that amputation may preserve my life, for the sake of those who are dear to me, I am willing to submit.—If not, I trust to your mercy to spare me those unavailing pangs which would render my departure painful to others as to myself.”

There was a firmness in his mode of speaking which wrung the hearts of the hearers. Even the surgeon’s voice was agitated, as he evasively replied,—“ For the present, Sir, I recommend only opiates and repose.”

“ I understand you !”—replied Sir Richard. “ How long do you accord me to speak a few parting words to my friends?—”

“ Whatever Sir Richard Norman may have to say, cannot be too quickly expressed,” whispered Mr. ——, addressing Avesford, as if to avoid pronouncing sentence of death upon the dying man. “ You have restoratives at hand. We will retire to the adjoining room to be at hand in case of need.—I recommend you to spare Lady Norman any further return to the chamber.—”

And by the haste of the medical attendants in quitting him, Sir Richard saw that his moments were numbered.

“ I thank you heartily for being here, Avesford,” said he, when he found himself at length alone with his brother-in-law. “ You are, of all others, the man I would fain have had by me at such a moment. That this is no parade of regard; you will find attested by the fact that my last deed, in quitting Selwood for ever, was to add your name to my will as co-executor with Matilda. Deride not the assertions of a dying man, Avesford, when I protest to you that I *foresaw* this event, I *felt* that my end was drawing near; and I bless God for even this agonizing death-bed, since it relieves me from an apprehension I have long entertained, that I should die by my own hand !”

For a moment he was silent, overpowered by the profound emotion given from a thousand painful reminiscences; and Avesford, believing him to be exhausted by the efforts of speech, hastily tendered the remedies placed within his reach by Mr. —.

“ I respect you as a man of principle and honour,” resumed Norman, faintly pressing the hand of his brother-in-law. “ We have not been long acquainted ; but from the first hour I passed in your company, my dear Avesford, I felt that I could wish you to be a father to my children,—a brother to my wife.—You are called upon somewhat hastily to accept these duties.—My time is short.—*Will* you console my last moments by your acquiescence?—”

“ I will,—I do !” exclaimed Avesford, his tears falling unrestrained upon the hand extended towards him. “ I promise you on the faith of an honest man, to execute to the best of my abilities, the trust you repose in me !—”

“ Thanks, thanks !”—faltered the sufferer, the contraction of his brow relaxing for a moment, as if partly relieved from a load of care. “ In a worldly point of view, I do not meet this crisis unprepared. You will find ample instructions among my papers at the Manor. Enclosed in my will also, is a letter addressed to my son, which I commit to your hands to retain inviolate, till Walter shall attain his majority.

On that day, let him open it in your presence ; but should he die under age, I charge you, commit the packet to the flames.—The words of a deathbed, my dear Avesford, are sacred words !—My last entreaty to you is an oath that, till the appointed period, even your wife and mine shall remain ignorant of the existence of this letter ?—”

Avesford pressed his brother-in-law’s hand in token of assent.

“ Speak !”—exclaimed Sir Richard Norman. “ I cannot die in peace till the voice of comfort have sounded in my ears !—”

“ I solemnly engage myself to fulfil your wishes. No living soul shall be acquainted with the existence of the letters !”—replied Avesford, in a low, concentrated voice.

“ Enough !”—said the dying man, over whose countenance convulsions of agony were now rapidly passing ; and feebly drawing towards him the hand of Avesford which enclasped his own, he held it a moment to his lips. “ Be this the seal of an eternal covenant between us !”—he faintly murmured ; and as he sunk back on

his pillow exhausted by these almost miraculous efforts, Avesford feared that his spirit was already passing away. A groan of unspeakable anguish at length proclaimed that sensibility was still vouchsafed him.

“ I die in the faith of my fathers,—and with my fathers would I be laid in the grave !”—faltered Sir Richard, in a hoarse voice, after a painful pause. “ Should the rigour of the law visit the unfortunate fellows whose rashness occasioned the fatal accident which deprives me of life, step forward in their behalf; and if punishment be awarded, see their families provided for on my account.—Let not the number be augmented of those who may have cause to curse my memory. I have sins to answer, far more heavy than their ruin. Avesford—my dear Avesford !—this is a trying hour—a bitter hour—an hour which no measure of preparation may abide;—far less a soul so lost and erring as mine.—Give me drink,—give me opium,—give me peace !—I have not strength to face all that is gathering round me now !”

Instead of complying, Avesford hastily summoned Mr. S——; by whose aid, temporary relief was afforded to the patient, who for some minutes lay silent upon the pillow as if enjoying a momentary respite.

“Where is Matilda!—Call Matilda!”—were the first intelligible words he uttered on unclosing his eyes.

“Let me entreat you, Sir, to spare the tender feelings of Lady Norman,” interposed Mr. ———.

“You do not know my wife, Sir, and you do not know *me*,”—said the dying man, almost sternly. “Call Matilda, my dear Avesford, and let my son be brought to my bedside.”

And in spite of the remonstrances of the surgeons, Avesford chose that the request of his brother-in-law should be complied with. His expectations were not disappointed. Lady Norman advanced into the room without an exclamation—without a word.—Scarcely sensible to what was passing around her, she resembled a corpse obeying the commands of a voice from

the dead, as she leaned her head against the bedstead, and gazed intently upon the dying face of her husband.

“ I have summoned you hither, my most beloved wife,” faltered Norman, in a voice that no longer retained the firmness with which he had unfolded his last instructions to his brother-in-law,—“ to receive, in presence of witnesses, my humble thanks for your unremitting love and duty. You have been to me a wife, such as never husband yet was blessed with,—such as, alas ! *your* husband little deserved. You have supported harshness, caprice, injury ;—you have been an angel, Matilda—a spotless, holy angel ;—and long may you live to display these precious virtues, as a joy and an example to our children !—”

At these words, Matilda looked round distractedly ; she looked round to see whether there were none present to whom she could appeal with an entreaty that the dying man might be exhorted to confession. At such a moment, the words “ *our* children ” sounded like his fiat

of eternal condemnation. But no human look responded to hers. The professional men stood calm and curious, noting the *symptoms* of the dying man. Avesford and Elizabeth sought only to lighten his mortal sufferings. Not one of them was with her in the spirit.

“Blessed woman,—I bid thee farewell!”—faltered Norman, with impeded utterance. “I dare not ask thee to forgive—I would not ask thee to forget.”—Then, fixing a look of yearning and intense love upon the face of his wife, “Come nearer,” said he, raising his voice, when at that moment, in obedience to his summons, Ghita and her young charge entered the room. “Lift my beloved boy towards me!—Be not afraid, Walter, of your poor, dying, disfigured father.—Kiss me, Walter—kiss me for the last time!—I am about to leave you. You will henceforward be obedient to Mr. Avesford, and a tender and dutiful child to your mother; in all things comporting yourself as becomes the name of Norman, and the heir of Selwood. Matilda!” he continued, raising his hand to—

wards his wife, and drawing her down towards the boy, “ I charge you, by the recorded vows of your lips, that, as you have been the truest of wives, you prove as good and tender a mother to my son !—”

Lady Norman, half resisting, half frantic, gazed wildly around her, exclaiming,—“ And no blessing to my child !—He dies, and bequeaths no blessing to my child !—”

“ Ghita !” resumed Sir Richard, addressing the Italian woman, who stood composed and stern by the bedside, awed by the presence of mind of the agonized man. “ I pray you bear witness of my last moments !—You are the only person present professing my faith.—Be it yours to attest unto those who regard me, that it was through no waywardness or negligence I dispensed with the last sacraments of my church !—”

Lady Norman, who had despatched a messenger to Selwood at the same moment as to the Avesfords, requiring Mr. Manningham to hasten to the fatal spot, bringing her little

girl to receive the benediction of her parent, started as, at that moment, the galloping of horses became audible. A carriage was heard to stop.

“It is your daughter!”—cried she. “Exclude her not, dear Norman, from your last affections. Bless also this little one for my sake.—If you ever loved me,—if you would have me faithful to your last instructions,—bless—oh! bless my helpless child!”

“I will,—I do!” said he, in faint accents, bending upon the earnest face of his wife a look softened by tenderness and compassion. “Let Constance be brought to me. Her innocence may plead with Heaven for mercy upon her unhappy father!”

And as the door of the chamber slowly unclosed, the eyes of the expiring man turned wistfully towards it, expecting to rest upon his child; while those surrounding the deathbed stood aside, to give the infant access to its father.

But at that moment, a groan of horror burst from the lips of Norman, and a frightful pang

distorted his countenance.—It was the Abbé O'Donnel who advanced slowly into the room. Having obeyed the summons of Matilda, he was awaiting at the Manor their return from Liverpool, when the messenger of sad tidings arrived, requiring spiritual aid for Sir Richard Norman.—

Imposing and calm, the old man stood beside the bed of the dying sinner.—

“Disturb him not!”—cried Avesford, perceiving in a moment the agony produced by the stranger's sudden appearance in the frame of the dying man. “He is insensible.—It is too late!—”

“In the name of the Most High God, I charge you,”—said the trembling voice of the priest,—while Matilda, with clasped hands, gazed in dreadful uncertainty upon the altered countenance of her husband!—

But the announcement of Avesford obtained fatal confirmation. The surgeon, who was standing beside the pillow, bent down and gently closed the eyes of the dead.—

The long-suppressed grief of the mourners

burst forth ; — while the priest, — falling on his knees beside the bed, — prayed for mercy upon the sinful soul which he had trusted to rebuke into atonement, or soften into repentance !



CHAPTER XI.

Rouler dans ce tourbillon, c'est gâter son âme.

LE MERCIER.

THE December of 1835, though in London misty and dismal, was a fine open season in the country. The grand campaign of aristocratic heroism was commencing. Leicestershire blushed scarlet with excitement ;—" the cry was still "—Tallyho !—

His Majesty and His Majesty's ministers, with due regard to the solitudes of a nation divided into lords, commons, and fox-hunters, had suspended, with sufficient prorogation, the unprofitable synod which prosed in behalf of the country.

Parliament was up,—its worshipful members down at their country-seats. The poor were on the look-out for their annual dole of coals and blankets ;—the servants' halls athirst for strong beer ;—the pews of parish-churches were enlivened with holly-branches,—and every mansion of mark and likelihood with Christmas guests.

For that season which on the continent rings its merry changes in towns and cities, inviting the higher class of the population to congregate in joyous multitudes amid the gorgeous galas of the court,—the crowded theatre,—the giddy pageant,—gives in England the signal for dispersion ; and leafless groves and sodden pastures, flowerless gardens and miry ways, prove more attractive than the leafy brightness of summer, scattering flowers over our valleys, and breathing promises of peace and plenty to the rural population.—No matter !—the poor are gainers by the infatuation ; and it must be admitted that the highest evidence of the opulence and refinement of Great Britain

is to be found in a first-rate country-house prepared for its holiday hospitalities.

Tuxwell Park was overflowing with company ;—not the Tuxwell Park of Lord Selsdon's bridal days, with its old-fashioned *corps de logis*, and modest dependencies ; but the fine mansion produced by two extensive wings added to the old house by the present Lord Farleigh on the death of his father, with a set of princely hunting-stables, the admiration of the country round.

For Tuxwell might now be considered the family seat. Farleigh Castle was comparatively deserted ; being inhabited only during the sultry months of August and September. Its noble site and commodious distribution pleaded nothing in its favour. The roads were fatal to visiting, — the neighbourhood to sporting ;—while Tuxwell possessed the superlative Great British merit of being situated in a hunting country.

Thither, accordingly, Lord Farleigh had transferred his seat of government, at the cost of some fifty thousand pounds, to render it a

habitation suitable to his present fortunes ; and a vast expenditure of indignation on the part of his maiden-sister, Lady Emily, who witnessed with pain and grief the desecration of the home of her childhood.

The rest of his Lordship's family, however, warmly seconded his preference. Lady Farleigh loved the place for reminiscences of "lang syne." *There* had her youth been idled away ; there had her children been born to her. Her harmless existence naturally associated itself with Tuxwell ; and though strangers were of opinion that Lord Farleigh would never make more of the place than Louis XIV. was said to have made of Versailles,—"*un favori sans mérite*,"—the Countess was grateful to him for the favours showered upon the object of her partiality. Her daughters, Lady Louisa and Lady Sophia, now presented at court and moving in the world, preferred the cheerful populous neighbourhood of Tuxwell ; while young Lord Selsdon, who was just quitting Eton for Oxford, a dashing amateur in the leading pursuit of his order, regarded the kennel

and stables of Tuxwell as chef d'œuvres surpassing those of the picture-gallery of Farleigh Castle. A worthy son of his father, young Selsdon already devoted the energies of his mind and body to fox hunting. The pursuit which our half-educated sires were compelled to adopt as a relief for their vacant hours, having been heightened to the relish of the present day by a touch of profligacy in the luxurious expenses it entails, it is esteemed worthy to engross the attention of those who disdain all pleasures untinged by folly and extravagance.

It was gratifying indeed to Lord Farleigh to behold in his son a youth of such promise and spirit; having gone through Eton "very fairly,"—that is, with all the indulgence due to his future earldom; and already one of the boldest riders in the county and a first-rate judge of a horse. The Earl, meanwhile, had subsided into a heavy, red-faced, hard-riding, hard-living man of forty-five; kind-hearted and domestic, a bigoted tory in his politics, but a liberal landlord to such of his tenants as chose to bow the knee to the golden image he had set

up,—voting and praying according to his lordship's conscience; supporting his lordship's members; preserving his lordship's foxes, and adhering to the worship of the church by law established. He was, in short, as the *Conservative Chronicle* of the county frequently informed its readers, “one of the finest specimens extant of the British nobleman of good old times !”

The good-humoured unenlightened boy, Lord Selsdon, had, in fact, been the father of the narrow-minded, kindly-affectioned man, Lord Farleigh; and, though the gradation may not appear at first so natural, the superficial, lively Sophia, was now the elegant and worldly Countess. Forced by the misjudging zeal of the Farleigh family into the vortex of fashionable society, it was perhaps fortunate that the influence of such persons as the Dawlishes, Normans, and Arthur D.'s, had rendered her nothing worse than frivolous. Dress and fashion,—music and fine people,—had luckily become her only idols; and though the cultivation of these polite

predilections withdrew her attention from her children, and consigned to a head-nurse and patent-governess the authority which never should have escaped her hands, they had not prevented her from remaining an attached wife, —contented to spend the five hunting and three shooting months of the year in the country, provided she were allowed to fill the house with company, and pass the four remaining months amid the glitter and confusion of the supreme *bon ton* of London. There was nothing in her conduct in the slightest degree derogatory to her order. The Farleighs had gloried in seeing their daughter-in-law assume a definite position in the world, and become a star of the narrowly-horizoned court of George IV.; while poor old Mrs. Ravenscroft, towards whom she remained an affectionate, grateful daughter, considered that Sophy was fulfilling a moral duty in adopting the practices of her degree. “Sophia was forced to do at Rome as they did at Rome; she was so popular,—so admired,—so much the fashion.—From the moment of her

arrival in London, not an instant could she call her own.—Fortunately she had excellent nurses and a most confidential governess, under whose care the dear children were growing all that a mother's heart could desire.” That is, they grew into well-mannered, accomplished girls; eager only for the day that was to emancipate them from the school-room, and inaugurate them into the career of fashion so bewitching to their mother that she forgot even her children in the pursuit.

As they advanced towards womanhood, however, even the motherly heart of the indolent, unobservant Lady Farleigh, began to lack something in her daughters. Though their desertion of Farleigh Castle had afforded some interruption to her intimacy with the family at Selwood Manor, her annual intercourse with the friend of her youth was warm and unconstrained; and she had discernment to notice the very different state of feeling existing between Lady Norman and her lovely Constance from that prevailing at Tuxwell Park. Yet, if she did not absolutely blame her own girls, she was

far from attributing to herself her just share in the errors of the system.

The widowed Lady Norman had devoted seventeen years of her life to the gentle creature vouchsafed as its consolation,—the Ariel of her “still vexed Bermoothes;”—and in the grateful love of her tender child, she had her reward.—Constance Norman was a vital portion of her mother’s existence; had known no other nurse,—no other preceptress.—Matilda had found courage to recommence her own defective education, to qualify herself for presiding over that of her daughter. But unluckily, while imbibing and imparting the lessons destined to store the mind and strengthen the understanding of her daughter, she had neglected to fortify the heart. Blind, like every other human being, to the seat of her own weakness, she saw not that the errors of her life were attributable to overweening affection; and not only persisted in her fault by transferring to her girl the worship she had formerly bestowed on her husband, but trained up the gentle susceptibility of Constance, to feel that all human happiness is concentrated in recipro-

city of human affection. It was a lovely fault—a gentle fault—a *woman's* fault;—but still a fault!—

Lady Farleigh, accustomed to confer with Lady Louisa and Lady Sophia as pleasant acquaintances, could not but perceive that it was an intimate *friendship* which united together the mother and daughter at Selwood Manor. Unused to judge harshly either of herself or others, *she* attributed the difference to the fact that her two girls found friends and confidantes in each other, while Constance had no companion or associate but Lady Norman. For she had never happened to see her with her brother. She had never witnessed the passionate fondness of Sir Walter for his sister, or the earnest love with which it was requited; the young heir of Selwood having now been more than a twelvemonth on the continent, during which time, Matilda and her daughter remained almost isolated at the Manor.

Between the Ladies Sophia and Louisa, and Miss Norman, meanwhile, existed the most friendly regard. Annual visits had constantly

entertained the intimacy of the parents. Matilda cultivated for her daughter the acquaintance of Lady Farleigh's girls as an incentive to emulation in her studies; while the professed governess at Tuxwell regarded Miss Norman as a poor, inoffensive girl, whose education was shamefully neglected, but whose manners were so shy, and whose prospects in life so brilliant, that no injury was to be apprehended for her pupils from the association.

Very different were Lord Farleigh's views respecting Sir Walter. With due respect for the memory of his late neighbour Sir Richard, he could not forgive his having delegated the guardianship of his son to a Liverpool merchant, an avowed radical,—a supposed enemy to church and state. Not contented with having connected himself with a tribe of Birmingham brass-founders, Sir Richard had perpetuated the evil by bequeathing his son to the hands of the Philistines. Instead of selecting himself, his nearest country neighbour, and Giles Norman, Lord Mornington, his nearest kinsman (both right-thinking Tories and friends to their country), to teach the young .

ideas of the youthful Baronet how to shoot, he had left him under the petticoat-government of his mother, and the still more fatal influence of a man who, in spite of his wealth, personal respectability, and distinction in parliament, was, after all, but a perverter of the public morals, and a disturber of the public peace.—What chance of a manly sportsman or a gentlemanly conservative from such a school?—

Lord Farleigh rejoiced that five years' difference of age would be a bar to all familiarity between his son and young Norman.

CHAPTER XII.

Time hath, my lord, a wallet on his back,
In which he puts alms for Oblivion.

SHAKSPEARE.

AND it is precisely the *amount* of alms bestowed by Time upon oblivion, which enhances the value of the diminished treasures he retains for the enjoyment of memory!—The imperceptible links enchainning the trivial events of daily life unite them in such harmonious gradation that nothing seems discrepant or surprising; but jump over fifteen or twenty years, and the syncopic transition will demonstrate with powerful effect, the mighty progress perpetually operating, unseen, unheard, unfelt, around *us* and our contemporaries.

From the death of George III., for instance, to that of William IV., what changes in public opinion—in the legislation of the country—in the position of Europe—in the balance of power ! —Most of us have lived through these eventful sixteen years, heedless of the mighty reforms they were silently effecting ; yet could Sir Richard Norman have risen from the grave at the epoch of his son's attainment of his majority, he would scarcely have credited with what uneventful ease the catholics had been emancipated from thralldom, and parliament purified from corruption. It must have startled him to learn, that by a sudden turn of the wheel toryism was grovelling in the mire ;—that a promise had been already extorted from his son to represent, when of age, the neighbouring borough of T—— ; that Avesford was a popular member, and Cruttenden Maule the Anacharsis Cloots of fifty thousand sturdy malcontents :—while Lord and Lady Mornington were trembling for the suppression of their patent place and pension,—Madame de Montrond was darning stockings at Prague,—and Admiral Guerchant Prime Mi-

nister of the King of the French:—that the royal cottage had disappeared from Windsor Park,—that the Queen's house was now the Queen's palace,—and the autocratic temple of Versailles, a national museum!—

Yet all this had been accomplished without a social earthquake, or moral volcanic eruption; the rough places were made plain, and the crooked straight, by the mere irresistible force of events—the mere progress of time, which brings all things to their level.

In the external appearance of things at Selwood Manor, meanwhile, little change was discernible. Avesford and Lady Norman, to whose hands as wide a discretionary power had been bequeathed by Sir Richard as was compatible with the strict nature of the entail, were too judicious to fancy that the place needed improvement; and saving that a few old tenants were replaced by their sons, and a few old woods ripe for the axe, cleared in fitting season, all was as of yore.

According to the tenour of Sir Richard's testamentary instructions, Walter had been edu-

cated at home, under the care of Mr. Manningham, till it was time to remove to Stonyhurst, where he remained till his seventeenth year. The two years following were spent at Rome under the care of his tutor; and the remaining years, till the accomplishment of his majority, in a tour of Europe.

“ I wish my son to be educated in the faith of his forefathers,” wrote Sir Richard; “ but should his views on attaining to man’s estate incline towards protestantism, or should he feel disposed to ally himself with a protestant, Walter Norman will offer no offence to my memory in following the bent of his inclinations.”

This clause in the testamentary dispositions of his former pupil, had cut the Abbé O’Donnel to the soul. Overpowered by the dreadful catastrophe which had precipitated Sir Richard Norman into the grave, the old man had scarcely found courage to officiate in the religious duties naturally falling to his share. Surmounting his anguish, however, he assisted Manningham

in the solemnization of the obsequies of his departed pupil; but having risen from a bed of sickness to attend the summons of Lady Norman, the effort proved too much for him. Unable to enter at once into those explanations with Matilda which the interests of the heir of Selwood seemed to demand, the Abbé deferred till both should have resumed some degree of composure the *éclaircissement* he considered indispensable; and set off to Lancashire to discharge, during this afflicting and probably final visit to England, the last services he might be able to render to a Church which, among her faithful sons, boasted none who had ministered more zealously to her welfare.

He was to visit Selwood on his return; and Lady Norman trembled at the prospect of the interview. But the hand of a mightier disposer was over them both. The fatigue of the journey—the shock by which it was immediately succeeded—proved too much for the broken constitution of a man worn out by fasts and mortifications. The words of Wolsey's salu-

tation to the Abbot of Leicester announced to O'Donnel's host of the north a similar consummation; and instead of welcoming him back to the house of mourning, the suffering widow of Sir Richard Norman received an announcement that, within two months of the death of his pupil, the old man slept in death!—His decease was sudden, while officiating at the altar in his sacred functions;—without fear and without pain,—without a word of farewell for those he loved, or an admonitory word for the widow of Sir Richard Norman.

The Avesfords were almost angry at the vehement regret expressed by Matilda on learning the death of the Abbé. Though far from sharing the prejudices of Tom Cruttenden, his partner, or his god-son, against the vocation of the venerable priest, they could not conceive his loss to be in any way important to Lady Norman; and considered it a happy thing for Walter that one bigot the less would interfere in the control of his early studies. *They* could not sympathize with Matilda's feelings, that in the Abbé she had lost her husband's intimate

associate ; the only person to whom his wishes and opinions were accurately known.

Stunned by the blow of her own bereavement, Lady Norman remained for some time indifferent to the possibility that Walter's claims might be called in question ; and when at length the importunities of business recalled her to the recollection of the precipice on which she stood, she was tranquillized at once by a letter from Lady Catherine Norman, written in pretended ignorance of any ill-will between the late Baronet and her husband, and offering the warmest assurances of friendship on the part of Giles Norman towards his young cousins, Sir Walter and his sister. They had given up all idea of disputing the legitimacy of the heir of Selwood. Having pushed their secret examination into the nature of his claims so as to ascertain that Sir Richard's measures were too carefully taken to leave them an inch of vantage ground, and hopeless of defeating the young Baronet as antagonists, found it their best policy to fortify their position in the world as heirs presumptive to the title and property, by be-

coming his confederates and allies. Nor did the life of a dashing, daring boy present half the obstacles to their hopes which had existed during the life of Sir Richard Norman.

As Sir Walter grew towards maturity, however, these expectations gradually lessened. It was impossible to behold a finer or more promising young man than young Norman, when he took leave of them, after quitting Stonyhurst on his way to the continent. Their own pampered, sickly son, though four years his senior and a captain in the guards, was far inferior in appearance; and though Giles's elevation to the tory peerage, as Lord Mornington of Grove Park, diminished his regret for the probable loss of the baronetcy, yet the impermanency of government benefactions, in these reforming times, served to enhance his estimation of the Selwood rent-roll. Even "captains," they knew, "were casual things;" and it was an afflicting consideration that their puny son, the inheritor of three thousand per annum, was likely to be reduced to pauperism by the curtailments of office; while

Sir Walter Norman enjoyed ten thousand, and was qualified to do honour to the endowment.

It had been Avesford's principle, all-witless as he was of anything more than met the eye in the position of his ward, to allow him free communication with every member of his father's family. Matilda, sensitively alive to the true circumstances of the case, and personally mistrustful of Lord and Lady Mornington, suggested, in *their* instance, more reserve. But Avesford would not hear of it.

"Let the lad be brought up with his eyes open," said he. "Since his father nobly consented that he should make his election in matters of religion, surely it is our duty to take care that he enjoys every opportunity of deciding for himself in such minor points as family feuds and idle animosities.—Let the boy be brought up with his eyes open."

On the other hand, Avesford and his wife were sometimes amazed at the unaccountable preference accorded by Matilda to her daughter. Every human feeling may be feigned save that of mother's love. But in *that*, nature cries

aloud ; and with all Lady Norman's desire that no difference should be perceptible in her treatment of Walter and Constance, scarcely a visitor ever quitted Selwood Manor during the childhood of the two, without noticing how much the little girl was the favourite.

The children themselves were happily blind to the circumstance. Lady Norman was still to Walter all she had been from his birth ; and the boy could conjecture no softer affection, no care more vigilant, than that of his beloved mother. By his father and nurse indeed this filial feeling had in infancy been fostered ; by the former, from anxiety to knit more closely the ties uniting Matilda and the boy ; by the latter, from knowing that the claims and privileges of her nursling were dependent on the will of Lady Norman. Between the lessons of both and his intuitive sense of the feminine loveliness of her character, his devotion to his mother became a passion rather than a sentiment. The slightest reproof from her lips would bring tears into his eyes, when the chastisements of others rendered him only more stubborn. She had no need to en-

force her authority. It needed only to say, "Lady Norman wishes it,—her ladyship desired that it might be thus,"—to reduce him to unqualified submission. In Constance, he adored his mother's image refined and softened; and his tenderness for his sister resembled rather the devotion of a lover than the rough familiar fondness prevalent in a family of young people of the same age.

Sir Walter grew up pre-eminently handsome. With the prejudice which delights in tracing family resemblances, every one in Worcestershire decided that he was the image of his father. But Lady Norman saw with more discerning eyes. There was an accidental resemblance between them, in their darkness of hair and complexion; but while thankful for the chance which so far favoured their deception, she could not help wondering that eyes were to be found so unobservant as to trace affinity between the dark grey eyes and stern brow of Sir Richard, and the joyous expression of Sir Walter's hazel eyes and mobile countenance. Not but that the looks of the latter could be moved

from their youthful brightness; but they never clouded into sullenness. The feeling of the moment often fired that impetuous temper; for Sir Walter had even more susceptibility of character than his predecessor. His passions, less deeply seated, were more readily moved. But he had a fine generous character to redeem every lesser fault, and account for the strong affection with which Avesford was beginning to regard his ward.

It was Matilda's fate to behold her whole family attach itself to Walter to the prejudice of her little girl!—The frailty of human nature causes even human tenderness to be influenced by worldly motives. The Maules were fond of Walter; but they were *proud* of Sir Walter Norman of Selwood Manor. Old Maule, as he grew into years, actually doated upon his grandson; preferring him at once to Constance Norman,—to little Charles, the sickly, only child of the Avesfords,—and to the half-dozen mum, prim, demure, unmeaning Maules, of Woldham Rectory. Even the Cruttendens, young and

old, though affecting much indignation that he should have been consigned to the guardianship of Avesford, a comparative stranger in the family, delighted in the lad; and were never happier than when passing a few days at Selwood every autumn; young Crutt devoting himself to the preserves, and old Crutt to bringing down higher game by smoking the Catholic tutor, and joking poor Matty into tears by recommending a second marriage.

Though scarcely less partial, the regard of Avesford for the young man was necessarily of a higher order. He delighted in the manliness of Walter's character, and the vigour of his understanding. Under the hands of Man-ningham, he had become a fine scholar. But he was not a *mere* scholar; and though secured by the peculiarities of his education from the school-boy's inevitable waste of time, his frequent visits to Fern Hill, and the absence of all maternal oversolicitude on the part of Matilda, preserved him from effeminacy, the ordinary defect of home-bred boys. On quitting England for

Rome, at seventeen years of age, Sir Walter was a spirited, impetuous youth, and on returning home to be emancipated from the control of his tutor ere he commenced the tour of Europe, it was impossible to behold a more graceful young man, and difficult to find a more endearing.

At that epoch of her troubled life, a new sense of uneasiness beset the bosom of Matilda!—Four years younger than Sir Walter, Constance was now fifteen; and though in childhood accustomed to witness their mutual endearments with satisfaction, she could not divest herself from a feeling of repugnance in witnessing the caresses bestowed upon Walter by the unsuspecting girl.

Already Constance regarded him with the enthusiastic admiration of the Avesfords, and the tenderness of the fondest of sisters. No person was equal to Walter!—Nothing was too good, too great, too noble, for Walter!—Her affection for her brother was scarcely secondary to her dutiful love for her mother; and when at length the

appointed period elapsed for his return, and the lively, affectionate boy, was found to have progressed into the dignified, accomplished young man, the enthusiasm of Constance knew no bounds; and new disquietude entered into the soul of Lady Norman!—

She could not at all times bring herself to recollect that the nominal brother and sister were as completely so in feeling, as the children of one father and one mother; and that the familiarities between them which caused her own cheeks to flush, were precisely such as occurred hourly, without notice, between Lord Selsdon and Louisa and Sophy Farleigh. She persuaded herself that a more than common love instigated Sir Walter's excessive tenderness for his fond and lovely sister.

The false position in which they stood, the false position in which she had assisted to place them, was terribly visited upon the idolizing mother. She grew suspicious, fretful, unjust. The young people were objects of constant solicitude. When out of sight, she could not rest

till she had sought them out; when in her presence, her eyes were ever upon them. Sir Walter's commonest expressions were carefully revised and analyzed. She was always attempting to trace his sentiments to some latent and unexpressed feeling; and, anxious and ill at ease, ended by communicating her uneasiness to those around her.

"Lady Norman has not sufficient confidence in her son," was Manningham's expression, in his parting interview with Avesford, with whom, throughout their mutual duties, he had maintained friendly relations. "She is too intent upon examining his opinions and checking his expressions. Her ladyship will end by destroying that happy frankness of character which has hitherto formed one of the most attractive characteristics of my pupil."

Certain families of the neighbourhood, on the other hand, attributed her watchfulness over him to the interested motives which so often inspire the widowed mother of an opulent, only son.

“ Lady Norman is afraid that any one should obtain political influence over the mind of Sir Walter,” cried Sir Robert Skaremidge, the tory lessee of Scarwell Park. “ Lady Norman and her radical relations have hugger-muggered the education of the young man among themselves, in a manner highly unbecoming his situation in the county; and now they are afraid of his breaking the chain and getting loose among gentlemen of his own station in life, and the right way of thinking.”

“ How fussy we are about our young Baronet!” cried Mrs. Redely, of the Avonwell Forges, glancing at her pretty daughter Amy. “ Poor Lady Norman seems afraid of Sir Walter being snapt up if she takes her eyes off him, as she herself snapt up Sir Richard; for so high as my lady may think herself, she was but a Brummagem miss!—However, she needn’t alarm herself. I can assure her nobody in *my* family has the least notion of taking her place at Selwood Manor, which I suppose is what her heart is set on.”

But if the feelings which gave rise to these illiberal comments proved painfully uncontrollable during Sir Walter's three months' visit to Selwood at the age of nineteen, what were they likely to become now that more than a twelve-month's tour in Europe and the East had added new graces to his person,—new charms to his mind!—Emancipated from the control of his tutor, the tone of his character had attained new strength and higher independence. Though Manningham was a man of enlightened mind, scorning to maintain the ascendancy of his church by superstitious influence, and valuing the adhesion of a proselyte in proportion to the sincerity of his conviction, his mode of instruction had still, in some degree, savoured of the priest and the pedant; and Sir Walter's improvement under an enlarged and unshackled intercourse with the world, was perceptible even in his correspondence. Constance alone saw no difference; *she* had always judged her brother unimprovable. It was only Lady Norman, who, after perusing and re-perusing his letters on the eve of his expected return to England,

trembled at the idea of welcoming to the arms of her daughter this accomplished being,—this high-souled and chivalrous young man,—this profound and far-sighted sympathizer with the wants, sufferings, and injuries of mankind !—

CHAPTER XIII.

I'd have you sober and contain yourself;
Not that your sail be bigger than your boat.
Nor stand too much on your gentility,
Which is an airy and mere borrow'd thing
From dead men's dust and bones, and none of yours,
Unless you make or hold it.

BEN JONSON.

THOUGH Christmas was at hand, Lady Norman's importunities succeeded in drawing the Avesfords from Fern Hill, which yearly increasing prosperity had now converted into a splendid country-seat, to await at Selwood Manor the arrival of the young Baronet. A *mother* would have wished to pass those first days of reunion exclusively with her son; but Matilda invariably recoiled from the chance of finding herself alone with Walter.

“I don’t pretend,” said Avesford to his sister-in-law, on the day appointed for Sir Walter’s arrival, “that I am not almost as anxious as yourself to see the young fellow again. There is something more gratifying to me than I can express in gathering from all quarters reports of the high character he has attained on his travels, and feeling that I have borne my part in shaping his principles and opinions. But Bessy and I are old-fashioned people. We don’t like to be away from home at Christmas. It is not enough for the poor that we fling our alms at their heads like bones to a dog. Our people at Fern Hill are accustomed to draw nearer to us in winter time. I flatter myself there is no portion of the year that Bessy has not a tolerable insight into their necessities and deserts; but somehow or other, human benevolence, like the robin, is roused up and set a-piping by frosty weather; and it is our habit to examine more intimately into the condition of our humble neighbours at this season of the year. Bessy does not teach her parish schools; but she rewards those who

are well reported by her schoolmistress, and the children think more of the few kind words she says to them than they would of double her gifts. I flatter myself, too, that my old cronies at the almshouses will miss their fireside chat with me. You would be amused to hear the poor old creatures cross-question me every year when I return from the sitting of Parliament. Excuse me, therefore, dear Matilda, if we beg off in a day or two. Fulfil your engagement at Tuxwell Park for the early part of the holidays; and towards the end of January you must all come together to Fern Hill, that I may see something of Walter before the session calls me back to town."

"You will see him, I hope, in London," replied Matilda, in a low voice. "I trust Walter will spend the ensuing season in town."

"Why the deuce do you hope *that*? At *his* age, he is just as well in the country. Time enough on the attainment of his majority to launch into the meretricious, contemptible society into which all young men of Sir Walter's birth

and fortune must fling themselves, during their progress into reasonable beings."

"Surely a few months can make no great difference in Walter's powers of judgment?" pleaded Lady Norman.

"It will make the greatest in our degree of responsibility for his proceedings," replied Avesford; unable to inform Matilda that he held a letter from Sir Richard to his son, likely to contain instructions of high importance to his first entrance into life. "No, no!—keep him with you quietly this spring at Selwood.—It will be hard if you and Constance between you are not able to amuse the young gentleman.—Take him to visit Bessy, at Fern Hill;—take him to Woldham;—take him, if you will, to hear his uncle Cruttenden give tongue to radicalism loud as his mill-wheels and hot as his furnaces. In the middle of April Walter will be of age. You may then roast oxen and blaze away with bonfires at Selwood to your heart's content; and, when all that is over, you will still have time for the London season, provided your son feels inclined for the change."

Lady Norman sighed. She saw that a decided plan had been, as usual, traced out by Avesford, which was, as usual, likely to be followed ; and that for some months to come she must resign herself to Walter's domestication with his family.

As the hour drew near for his arrival, her agitation increased. The delight with which his approach was hailed by every human being on the estate, which would have rejoiced the partialities of a parent's heart, roused an involuntary feeling of vexation in that of Matilda. She fancied that from motives of interest the poor exaggerated their expressions of attachment to their young master ; while as to the Avesfords and Constance, *their* glee amounted to childishness !—Conscious at length with sudden self-reproach of her injustice, she not only reproved her fault, but fearing that her insensibility to the general joy might provoke attention, felt it necessary to assume a degree of hilarity, the deceit of which weighed upon her conscience, and added to her griefs.

Sir Walter having announced his intention

to be down by dinner time, Lady Norman retired to her dressing-room, apart from the gay family party, and was preparing her mind for the events of the evening, when she was startled by a tap at the door ; and whispers being audible without, she concluded that the housekeeper and her maid were waiting for orders.

“ Come in,” said she, in her usual gentle voice, without raising her head from the hand on which it was reclining ; then, startled by the hurried footsteps which approached her, she turned hastily round to discern the arms of Constance thrown round the waist of her noble-looking brother.

“ Mother !” cried Sir Walter, opening his arms to embrace her, without releasing himself from those of Constance. “ Dearest, dearest mother !—If you knew how I have been longing for this moment !—”

And amid the tumults of her agitated heart, Lady Norman was shocked to perceive that while his tears fell upon her cheeks, her own eyes remained dry and seared !—Her emotion on beholding him was the result of fear and

repugnance. She *could* not do him justice !— His filial tenderness would have touched her very soul, had it been the love of some other son for some other mother. But on the part of Walter towards herself, it seemed a mockery ; and she felt that she should be guilty of a further fraud in cheating that young heart of its affections. Instead of returning the fond and clinging embrace with which he folded her to his breast, Lady Norman disengaged herself abruptly, to sink breathless into a chair.

“ The shock has been too much for her ;— we were wrong not to apprise her of your arrival,” said Constance, anxiously offering a glass of water to the pale and trembling woman. “ After so long an absence, the delight of seeing you again, my dear brother, is too overpowering !—”

“ I hoped to have caused you an agreeable surprise by coming six hours before the appointed time,” said Walter, who was now kneeling at Lady Norman’s feet, and holding her hands in his own. “ But Avesford *told* me just now I was a blockhead, to fancy I gave plea-

sure by flurrying people's nerves.—Forgive me, dearest mother !—I was so impatient to behold you again !—”

Lady Norman smiled faintly, and imprinted the kiss which this apostrophe appeared to demand, upon the forehead of Sir Walter. The movement, indeed, was spontaneous. At that moment he recalled strongly to her mind, by the force of association, the image of the only man she had ever beheld in a similar position. Sir Richard Norman seemed actually before her, inspired by the affectionate devotion which had brightened their early years of marriage; and her heart not only warmed towards the living representative of her husband, but reproached her with ingratitude towards the son to whom she was the dearest object upon earth.

“ You are better now,—are you not ?”—said he, taking her hand, as he watched the colours of health revive upon her cheek. “ Yes, now you are almost yourself again,—and younger and handsomer than ever !—Who would ever fancy you the mother of a great grown-up

son?—Even my little Constance is almost too tall and womanly to appear your daughter.—Come hither!—I want to have another look at you, Constance!”—cried he, rising from Lady Norman’s feet and placing himself in a chair beside her, while he drew his sister upon his knee. “I heard wonderful stories of your beauty and accomplishments the other day at Munich, from your spindled Romeo, young Skaremidge, who has been deluging himself with all the Brünnen of Nassau, in hopes they may prove Castalian, and inspire him with a book as clever as Head’s.”

“Poor Lionel Skaremidge!”—observed Constance, with a smile. “He is a great admirer of mine or mamma’s—I hardly know which.”

“I know which,—because he did me the honour to ask my sanction to your becoming Mrs. Skaremidge. But upon seeing you again, I am not sure that I think you deserving the honour. How immensely she is grown!”—continued Walter, turning towards Lady Norman, after a deliberate survey of his sister. “Her hair so

much darker,—her appearance so much more womanly !—”

“And you, sir !”—cried Constance, pretending to resent his scrutiny. “Do you fancy that *you* had outgrown the age of growing when you left England ?—You have gained three inches, at least.—Stand up beside me, Walter.—Mamma ! *has* not my brother gained three inches since we saw him last ?—See !—my head scarcely reaches his shoulder !”

“It reaches just where I wish it to reach,” cried Walter, stooping down and kissing the fair brow that reclined against him. “You are now exactly the right height—exactly my mother’s height. My mother’s height was always my standard of perfection for a woman. I can’t bear a woman to be overtall. Half her time is taken up in trying not to appear different from the rest of the world. She is always afraid of being remarked. A woman should never be too much remarked.”

“You pronounce very boldly upon our sex, Walter,” said Lady Norman, feeling the neces-

sity of breaking silence. "You seem to have been making us your particular study?—We must expect, I perceive, my dear boy, to find a severe critic in you?—"

"A partial one," he replied, cordially. "You, my dear mother, and Constance, and Aunt Bessy, have made me difficult. It is natural that I should appreciate strongly the deficiencies of other women. And now tell me, Did you receive my letter from Calais?—Did you expect me to day?—"

"Were you not told down stairs that the Avesfords came last night from Fern Hill expressly to meet you?"—cried Constance, playfully tapping his arm.

"True, true!—I forgot it,—I forgot them!—I seem to forget everything but the happiness of being with you both again."

"Let us go down to my brother and sister," said Lady Norman, more composedly. "Avesford, who loves you like a son, will be mortified, my dear Walter, if you treat him as a stranger."

United with the rest of the little family party,

Matilda's embarrassment seemed to subside. She had leisure, while her frank, plain-dealing brother was interrogating the young traveller, touching the attempt at assassination of the King of the French which had occurred during his sojourn at Paris, to examine the air and countenance of Sir Walter. Never had she seen any one so strikingly handsome. To a person more accustomed than Lady Norman to the subdued evenness of manner of fashionable life, his deportment might probably have appeared too free, too animated. But a touch of boyhood still lingered in his character, which did but enhance the charm of his manly person and spirited address.

“Your mother has been trying to persuade us, Walter, that you will want to be off immediately to London,” said Avesford. “Are you really in so much haste to commence your career as a man about town?—”

“God forbid!” cried Sir Walter. “I have seen enough abroad of what you call men about town, driven by ennui to wander for a while in other countries, to feel ambitious of inscribing

myself in the muster roll. But why, my dear mother, did you fancy I should be in haste to leave you and Constance, when I have been wild with joy for the last three months at the mere thought of being with you again?—”

“Your sister wrote you word, I believe,” said Matilda, “evading a direct reply to the question, “that we were engaged to spend part of the Christmas holidays with our old friends the Farleighs?—”

“Yes,—I am very willing to go ;—but had you not made the engagement I should have preferred remaining at home.—I have so much to see and to learn about Selwood !—Dear Selwood ! Remember how little I have been here for the last four years !—But after Tuxwell, we have the whole spring and summer before us :—unless for a flying visit to Fern Hill, I will not stir from Selwood for months to come. I assure you, my dear uncle, that the more I see of Europe the more I am convinced that, as a residence, no country is comparable with England.”

“And every body admits Worcestershire to be one of its best counties and Selwood the pret-

tiest spot in Worcestershire," cried Constance, railying the prejudice of her brother.

"You and I do,—which for the present may suffice," replied Sir Walter, with a smile. "I am ashamed to own how often, among the finest Alpine scenery, or on the lovely shores of the Bosphorus, I have languished after a single glimpse of the green knolls of Selwood. Prejudice of ownership apart, I have never beheld a landscape so agreeable or cheering to my eye."

"I shall tell that secret to Louisa Farleigh, whom you used to call your little wife," whispered Constance ;" and she will confirm your former fancy for her by expressing a similar opinion."

"No, indeed—it would not be natural in *her*!"—cried young Norman. "I would rather hear *her* own a preference for Tuxwell Park. It is only *you*, Constance, from whom I shall always delight to hear a flourish in honour of Selwood. But tell me a little about the Farleighs.—Have they grown up as pretty as they promised to be?—"

"More so, I think. Yet somehow or other they disappoint me. The Farleighs are kind,

friendly, and good-humoured; but they seem to distinguish no one, not even themselves or each other. All the world is all the world to them. They are too general in their likings and civilities."

I understand you,—though, to do you justice, my dear, it would be difficult to express the thing more confusedly," cried her uncle Avesford. "They have lived too much in society. They are worn too smooth."

"I shall be in no danger from Lady Louisa if she does not distinguish *me*," added Sir Walter, gaily. "I am fond of being made a fuss with. I beg you to know, Miss Constance, that I was thought a very fine thing last winter at Vienna, and had half a mind to bring you home a *gnädige Gräfinn* for a sister-in-law, with a Styrian mountain and a set of drawing-room furniture worked in Berlin stitch by her own fair hands, by way of dowry."

"I don't want a foreign sister-in-law," said Constance. "I must have an Englishwoman."

"You are acquainted only with your countrywomen; but you have charming rivals on the

other side of the channel, and I have lost my heart and found it again fifty times since I parted from you."

"That you found it again, says little in their favour," argued Miss Norman.

"Little in mine, I fear. Had they found me worth the struggle, I was their slave for life."

Pleased to hear these frank avowals of admiration for other women, Lady Norman entered more cheerfully into the conversation, and the families of the neighbourhood of Selwood and Fern Hill were successively passed in review.

"We have a beauty arrived at the Forges, Walter, during your absence," observed Lady Norman. "Miss Redely, I think, was still at school at Bath when you were last here?"

"Has she turned out an acquisition?"

"Pretty, voluble, and underbred;—a pert school-girl, who decides on everything with the coarsest self-sufficiency,"—cried Avesford, who had no patience with the affectation of fine ladyism.

"Fie, fie, uncle!—You will find Amy greatly

improved by her trip to London," remonstrated Constance.

"I never saw her till her return ; and nothing less than so much levity and vulgarity would have put me out of conceit of so much prettiness. In London, she learnt only the extent to which a pair of white shoulders might be exhibited,—and an empty head exposed by flippancy attempts at wit.

There is no *woman* where there's no reserve.

Miss Redely is the dashing belle of race-balls and music-meetings ; but unless hereafter tamed down by the rough schooling of the world, is never likely to win her way into the respect of society."

"Beauty is a potent special-pleader!"—observed Sir Walter. "What conquests one sees achieved over the prejudices of society by the mere charm of a prepossessing countenance or manner."

"I grant you," cried Avesford. "But Miss Amy's countenance and manner are not prepos-

sessing. Her face is merely pretty—her manners absolutely hoyden.—The charm of the cestus is wanting.”

“ In that case, I should prefer Lionel Skaremidge’s ugly sisters,” replied Sir Walter, carelessly, “ who are at least unassuming and agreeable. And now tell me, my dear uncle, about your boy. Do you find poor Charles improve in strength under the orthopedic system?—Has he given up sea-bathing?—Is he able to drive about the grounds at Fern Hill?—”

“ He is *alive*,” replied Avesford, his demeanour suddenly saddened by recurrence to the fate of the gifted child whose mind seemed endowed with preternatural intelligence at the expense of physical force. “ Your letters and presents to him while abroad, my dear Walter, form the treasures of his little life. I need not tell you how much your recollection has gratified his parents. Bessy would not have left the little fellow on any other errand than to visit you after your long absence. Travelling does not agree with poor Charles; so that for

both their sakes, I renounce my wife's company when called to London by the duties of parliament."

"We will go and see them during your absence," said Sir Walter. "I shall visit the Farleighs to please my mother; and Charlie to please myself. I have brought him some rattletaps from the Tyrol;—indeed, my baggage is charged with foreign treasures from all parts of the world, like that of an oriental bridegroom. Constance must go up to my room and take her choice before I expose it to a general sack. Till I have a wife of my own, you know," he continued, turning towards Miss Norman, "*you* are my liege lady and mistress!—"

CHAPTER XIV.

Ils semblent tout savoir, à leur ton, leur maintien,
Mais ils ne savent rien,—n'apprendront jamais rien ;
Parlent avec mépris de tout ce qu'ils ignorent,
Et de leur nullité publiquement s'honorent.
Etres inconséquens, neufs et blasés, flétris
Tels que des fruits sans goût, avant le temps muris.

COLIN D'HARLEVILLE.

THE Farleighs were unaffectedly glad to welcome their young and old friends from Selwood ; Lord Farleigh being anxious to ascertain the bent of Sir Walter's politics, and the degree of his ardour as a sportsman ; and her ladyship no less so to present to her friend, Lady Norman, the Italian greyhound puppy she had been rearing for her, and exhibit the beauties of a wonderful *meuble* of an arabesque pattern, at

which she had been labouring since the beginning of summer. There was an old, easy, comfortable friendship between the two, which had survived even the refrigeration of eighteen years of London dissipation.

The girls, too, had the new waltzes of the season to execute for the admiration of Constance, and were anxious for her opinion touching the cut of the riding habits sent down by Inkson as a present from their sporting brother. Nevertheless, the feelings and opinions of the two younger ladyships were beginning to cede to the influence of the divining rod of fashion.

“ I am glad Constance is coming,” said Lady Sophia to her sister the night preceding the expected arrival of the Normans.

“ To own the truth, *I* had rather she came when the house was less full of company,” replied Lady Louisa. “ Lady Norman is a charming woman, and Constance a delightful girl; but they have lived so little in the world that they are up to nothing. One has to explain the commonest things to Constance; and the ordinary incidents of society bring her

to blushes and confusion. A person of that sort is a dead weight upon a circle. Besides, her simplicity and ignorance of the world, though silly and troublesome in the eyes of most people, make *us* appear sadly worldly and knowing, in those of a few."

"In short, my dear, you would have been as well pleased had the Normans delayed their visit till the Marquis and his mother left Tuxwell?"—cried Lady Sophia.

"Frankly, then, yes. Lady St. Aubyn will delight in an opportunity of pointing out to her son the charm of Constance's yea-nay notions and old-fashioned habits."

"And then Lord Charles Bartley and Sir Frederick Cranstoun are to be here on Thursday, who always cite Tuxwell as the only country house which deserves to be a house in town. Lady Norman's grave dignity, and Constance's missishness, will bore these men to death; and we shall have them declaring at the Travellers', on their return to town, that Tuxwell was wadded with country neighbours. The last time they were here, you know, we

had that divine Madame de Vandeuil, and the Hottendorfs.—*Cela sait vivre!*—to say nothing of the use they were to us in our *tableaux* and charades.”

“ There is one comfort in the change: we are secure from double-dealing on the part of the Normans. Lady Norman is above manœuvring for Lord St. Aubyn, and Constance above making up to the old lady. Remember how cunningly the Vandeuil carried off young Meldrum; and Madame de Hottendorf was certainly the cause of my misunderstanding with the Duke.”

Lady Louisa and Lady Sophia were accordingly almost as warm in their reception of Constance as Lord and Lady Farleigh of Lady Norman. About Sir Walter, they had not at present stooped to concern themselves. He was only a Roman-catholic Baronet, brought up among parvenus and radicals, and unsupported by the connexions of Eton or the Universities. He was nothing to *them*. Lord St. Aubyn had never heard his name; and Lord

Charles and Sir Frederick would probably vote him a quiz.

Even the striking advantages of his person said little in his favour. The Ladies Farleigh were of a school who entertain little reverence for personal endowments, unsupported by the charm of fashionable distinction. A hunchback *de bonne compagnie* would have stood better with them than an Adonis *de mauvais ton*. They received Sir Walter civilly as an old acquaintance; but were much obliged to papa for carrying him off, and engrossing his attention with game lists and lists of ministerial minorities.

With all their quiet self-assured egotism, however,—strong in the conquests of a London season, and an excellent standing in the world, — Sophia and Louisa were somewhat startled by the increased attractions of their contemned rival, Constance Norman. For the first time, they saw her attired in the *atours* of fashion. Sir Walter had commissioned his gay Parisian friends (among whom was the identical Madame de Vandeuil,

who had deprived Lady Sophia of the heart of Lord Meldrum, and young Norman for a fortnight of his own,) to assist in selecting the store of gifts for his sister which a Parisian *élégant* would lay at the feet of his bride; and Constance, though reluctant to abandon her usual simple style of dress, had not courage to neglect the gifts of her darling brother. Rich laces, fine embroidery, trinkets, flowers, fans, shawls, chaussures,—everything she wore was fresh from the mint of Parisian taste; and to have seen her invested in the graces of the Venus de Medicis, would not have so much excited the jealousy of the London belles. They, who were accustomed to overpower their country neighbours with the novelties of the London season, found themselves thrown into the shade by the freshness of newer fashions. Even their French maid, who had been wont to assure them, that “*elle n’était pas mal de figure, cette petite demoiselle de Normant, mais qu’elle manquait absolument de tournure!*”—was now compelled to own “*qu’elle était mise à ravir,—et jolie comme un ange!*”

It may be observed that nothing excites the jealousy of women of the world more keenly than toilet emulation. Beauty is a matter in which "taking thought" or spending money will do nothing. But dress is an affair of volition. "*N'a pas de beaux yeux qui veut ;—aura une jolie robe qui voudra !*"—and it is therefore a personal reproach to be eclipsed by the good taste or prodigality of another. So little, however, is this weakness likely to come within the comprehension of a simple girl, that Constance exhibited her pretty *fichus* and new bracelets in the hope of gratifying her brother, without a suspicion that they originated the clouds she saw gathering upon the brows of her fair companions. She had not been four and twenty hours at Tuxwell Park before their views were changed towards her.

"How faded and *mesquin* our pink gowns looked to-night beside that beautiful French muslin of Constance !" cried Lady Sophia. "Lord Charles will think us grown quizzes."

"It will be the story of Madame de Hottendorf over again !"—said Lady Louisa, in a tone of

pique. "But where on earth has Sir Walter picked up all his taste? The man has not yet passed a season in town; yet he understands exactly the right thing, and is lighter in hand than even Sir Frederick Cranstoun."

"How bored he will be at Selwood!"—mused Lady Sophia. "How ill Lady Norman and Constance's humdrum ways will suit a person accustomed to the ease and gaiety of Paris!"

"I don't know. He seems to have eyes only for his sister. Men like things at home which they detest everywhere else.—"

"He is certainly handsome and agreeable," observed her sister, carelessly; "and Lord St. Aubyn is so shy, that Sir Walter's flow of conversation told wonderfully to-day at dinner. But wait till you see him in contact with Lord Charles's set.—To-morrow you will find him sink, like a country actor brought out on the London boards.—Wait till you see him *aux prises* with a man of real fashion!"

Unconscious of the examination to which he was exposed, Sir Walter's demeanour was strictly natural. His homage was due to the

Ladies Farleigh under their father's roof. But he did not overlook his sister's claims; and after praising with sufficient fervour Lady Louisa's performance of Strauss's waltzes, proposed that Constance should give them an idea of a newer set by Lanner, which he had brought over, and which, as the last novelty, was of course vehemently applauded by the gay circle surrounding the piano. Miss Norman was entreated to repeat the performance. No one cared now for Strauss. "Strauss was *rococo*.—Strauss had not half the sentiment, half the imagination, of Lanner.—It was impossible to exceed Lanner's waltzes;—impossible to exceed the justice done them by Miss Norman!—"

"Constance is my mother's pupil," replied Sir Walter, proudly,—in reply to the interrogations of the Marchioness of St. Aubyn. "My sister has had no advantage of London masters."

"The reason she plays like a gentlewoman and not like a professor," replied her ladyship. "In my young days, amateur music was an agreeable addition to society; but I consider a modern concerto-playing young lady a

pest.—You might as well attempt to amuse a company by philosophical experiments!—Nothing is welcome to a sociable circle which enforces too much stress upon the attention.”

And the young Marquis of St. Aubyn, brought up without an idea of his own, fancied he was affirming his mother’s proposition, by adding, “Yes! I never heard a more charming performer than Miss Norman.—”

It was not every one present, however, who was inclined to be equally complimentary. Lord Charles, Sir Frederick Cranstoun, and a Mr. Merton, who had arrived with them from town, were at the head of that peculiar class of London men who hate every *thing* with which they are familiar, and detest every *person* with whom they are not. It was enough for them to find at Lord Farleigh’s table a family they had never heard of before, to make them draw up and grow disagreeable. Scarcely a word was to be extracted from their lips. They did not choose to commit themselves in presence of a strange man. How did they know whom he might be? The perfection of Sir Walter’s and

Miss Norman's dress told against them with the fastidious clique. A brilliant toilet upon fashionable people is a fashionable thing; but it converts an obscure individual into a tiger. They heard the handsome stranger addressed as "Sir Walter,"—but what of that?—He might be the son of a Lombard-street banker or West-end physician. They chose to be on the safe side of things, by sitting as far as possible from so equivocal a character, and not interchanging a syllable with any other member of the family.

Their suspicion that the handsome Sir Walter was an adventurer, was confirmed by his courteous attentions to old Lady St. Aubyn. Accustomed on the Continent to see women of any age or ugliness treated with distinction, and prepossessed by her admiration of his sister, he listened with well-bred courtesy to her tiresome stories; and unprepared for ill-manners in the high-born and highly-educated, he attributed Lord Charles's absorption over the newspaper to the embarrassment of finding himself among strangers, and accosted with

an attempt at conversation, the man who was secretly measuring him with the utmost plenitude of his contempt !—

But Norman, though honest enough to fall into such a snare, was not dull enough to misapprehend the look of frigid astonishment with which his civilities were received. He resolved to be more cautious for the future. Nothing irritated by a species of impertinence which he justly conceived to be disgraceful only to the perpetrator, Sir Walter resumed his lively conversation with the Ladies Farleigh and Lord and Lady St. Aubyn, as if no check had been offered. The Marchioness had a thousand inquiries to make concerning Paris,—concerning her nephew the Ambassador, and her various friends in the Faubourg St. Germain; and Norman's answers proved him to have been admitted to the exclusive Mondays and intimate Wednesdays of the Embassy,—to be the *ami de cœur* of *Rodolphe le spirituel* and *le beau Antonin*,—the sporting companion of Richelieu and Moskwa;—in the habit of dining with Caradoc and the king, and supping with Mars and Elsler;

—till at length Lord Charles began to entertain misgivings as to the justifiability of treating him like a Savoyard !

“ It was not, however, for so distinguished a member of the listless clique to trouble himself with inquiries or apologies. Having affronted a man without rhyme or reason, he fancied himself privileged to conciliate him on the same grounds ; and after fixing upon Sir Walter the heavy stare of pretended near-sightedness under cover of which people of his class perpetrate their offences against good manners, he was about to address him, when Norman, with a profound bow of mock respect, made off to the other end of the room, where he was speedily engaged in conversation with Lord Farleigh and the bigwigs of the party.

“ How charming Walter is grown, dear mamma ! ”—cried Constance to Lady Norman, when lingering that night in her mother’s dressing room, previous to retiring to rest. “ His manners are so courteous,—so frank,—so superior to those of any other young man in the house.”

“ There is a total absence of affectation in

him ; which is certainly a recommendation," replied her mother.

" But the nature which he does not disguise by art, is in itself so delightful !—Walter unites the good sense of a man with the sprightliness of a boy."

" Take care how you describe him to others in such glowing colours," said her mother, coldly. " A young girl should never speak of a young man in terms of enthusiasm."

" Not even of her *brother* ?—I should as soon think of checking myself, dear mamma, when uttering a panegyric on yourself !—"

" In both instances you would do well to guard your expressions. It is indelicate and ill-bred to indulge in company in the expression of emotions in which your companions are unable to sympathize. Family affections are of this description."

" Certainly, certainly !—In *mixed* company I should scarcely do so misplaced a thing as eulogize my mother or brother. But to praise to my dear mother her only son, is surely a different affair ?—Surely I may expect *you* to sympathize in my enthusiasm for Walter ?—"

“ I would rather have you less enthusiastic, even with me. Enthusiasm begets disappointment. The waxen wings of Icarus appear to me to typify enthusiasm rather than ambition. You played very well to-night, Constance,” continued Lady Norman, purposely changing the subject ; “ without making difficulties, and just as I wish to hear you.”

“ Make difficulties when Walter seemed so anxious that Lanner’s waltzes should receive justice?—But I am glad you were satisfied, mamma. Do you think my brother was pleased ? He did not seem much struck by Louisa’s performance ;—yet she has learned of Moscheles for the last eight years.”

“ Walter, like yourself, is partial ; for Lady Louisa is a first-rate pianiste.”

“ Perhaps that is the reason she interested him so little. Walter dislikes everything that resembles art or pretension,—particularly in women.—I have heard him say so a thousand times.”

“ Your brother’s opinions when he was last in England were unformed and inconsistent.

He is grown positive,—I trust we may find that he has grown reasonable.—”

“ You speak, mother, as if you had some *guignon* against my brother?—”

“ I do not wish him, my dear, to obtain unlimited influence over your mind. How do you like Lord St. Aubyn?—”

“ That silly boy?—I have not even thought about him. I never saw a more insignificant personage.”

“ He has just come into the enjoyment of sixty thousand a year, and two of the finest places in the kingdom. Lady Farleigh fancies him very much taken with Sophia.”

“ What can it signify?—Sophia would not think of marrying such a nonentity,—more particularly now that she sees him in hourly comparison with my brother.”

“ I suspect Lady Sophia is likely to consider Walter the greater nonentity of the two.”

“ But even Lord Charles and Sir Frederick Cranstoun, are more amusing than Lord St. Aubyn. When Lord Charles *will* condescend to converse, he has a great deal to say; and

when Sir Frederick gets out of his friend's hearing he is quite a rattle. While Walter was engaged to-night in that interesting conversation with Lord Farleigh and the Dean, about popular education on the continent, Sir Frederick kept relating all kinds of entertaining London anecdotes, as if expressly to draw people's attention from it; and Sophy and Louisa laughed so provokingly all the time that I could scarcely catch a word my brother was saying."

"It was more your business, Constance, to join in the conversation of your young friends, than to appear engrossed by the holdings forth of your own family. You will expose yourself to derision if you yield your whole attention to your brother."

Next morning, as Miss Norman was going down to breakfast on her mother's arm, they fell in on the staircase with Lady St. Aubyn; and Constance was obliged to fall back, while Lady Norman proceeded down stairs with the Marchioness. In the hall through which they were to pass, stood Sir Walter, examining a county map. As the elder ladies passed him, he turned

round with a respectful salutation ; but as they advanced, Matilda noticed the kiss with which the young man greeted his sister. The colour rushed to her face. It seemed as if all her cautions to Constance served only to increase the unreserve which was springing up between her and her brother.

In the course of the morning, a riding party was proposed. Lord Farleigh's hounds having to meet at an indifferent and distant covert, Sir Frederick and Mr. Merton alone had sportsmanship enough to accompany him to the field ; while Lord Charles, Walter, and the young Marquis, remained to escort the ladies. But Lady Norman made objections to her daughter joining the party. " Constance was grown so timid that she scarcely liked to trust her on a strange horse. She hoped they would excuse Constance."

" My sister grown a coward ?—My sister not like to mount anything but her own mare ?"—cried Sir Walter, suddenly striking into the conversation. " Why, Constance, this is a shocking account of you !—What has altered

you so strangely? — You were a bold rider when I left England !”

“ She met with an accident after you quitted us, and has been nervous ever since,” interposed Lady Norman. “ And now that Amy Redely excites so much notice by scampering over the neighbourhood, I scarcely allow Constance to go beyond the park gates.”

“ We must reform all this now that I am come home, and she has some one to ride with. I would not have her lose her seat on horseback for the world !” cried her brother. “ Constance, I shall have you out with me every day. Depend upon *me* to bring back your courage !”

Lady Norman felt vexed to hear Sir Walter assume a sort of authority over her girl. She had scarcely patience to listen to the conversation which was now proceeding between them.

“ Yes, yes,—you *must* ride to-day. Lady Louisa and her sister insist upon it,—and *I* insist upon it,—and every one insists upon it !”

“ If *you* insist upon it, there is an end of the matter,” replied Constance, quitting the room to put on her habit. And the Ladies Farleigh,

who chose to monopolize the attendance of the Marquis and Lord Charles, were relieved when they found that Sir Walter would be occupied in overcoming the fears of his sister.

“ I will not go,” whispered Constance to him at parting, “ unless you promise not to leave my side a moment.”

And Lady Norman, who, standing at the hall-door, overheard both the whisper and Walter’s reply in the affirmative, longed to forbid the expedition. She could picture to herself the admiration with which Sir Walter must necessarily contemplate the beautiful figure of Constance, never seen to greater advantage than on horseback ;—her fair ringlets streaming to the wind,—her delicate cheek flushed with the bloom of exercise ; while the stiff, constrained persons of the Ladies Farleigh, and their stony, inexpressive faces, afforded a foil to her perfections. But it was too late. The little party was already out of sight.

Could poor Matilda have followed them with her eyes, the fact would have overstepped her apprehensions. The spirited horse on which,

from carelessness or malice, poor Constance was mounted, kept her in real, and not altogether groundless alarm. Lord Selsdon had once or twice hunted him; and Lady Louisa, in the wantonness of youthful spirits, choosing to take the first fence on emerging from the park, it required more strength or skill than Miss Norman was mistress of, to restrain her horse from following the example. Agitated, yet anxiously controlling her alarm for fear of displeasing her brother, Constance sat fast, while her gay steed profited by every grip or drain upon the green strip of road along which they were cantering, to try the force of her hand. But Sir Walter, when he saw her really frightened and matched beyond her strength, instead of bantering her fears, grew almost as nervous as herself, and never for an instant quitted her side.

“ I think I will take Constance home,” said he at length, riding up to the Ladies Farleigh, who were proceeding in high spirits, indifferent to the comfort of their companion. “ Her horse is too much for her.”

“ Let us *all* return,” said Lady Louisa, recovering some sense of civility on being thus addressed.

“ By no means. My sister will insist upon proceeding if she finds herself an obstacle to your ride,” cried Sir Walter. “ And as she will be safer at home, let me beg of you to take no notice of us !”

Acquiescence was prompt on the part of the two girls, who were unwilling to have a pleasant ride interrupted by the incapacity of their friend ; and as it would have been indecorous to pursue their ride, unescorted, with the two young lords, Norman insisted that Lord Farleigh’s groom should proceed with the party. He and his sister required no such attendance.

It unluckily happened that Lady Norman was enjoying a solitary walk on a terrace commanding a view of the approach to the house, when Constance and Sir Walter were descried winding leisurely along the road !—Miss Norman’s horse was quiet now that it was parted from its frisky companions ; so quiet as to admit

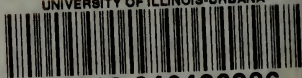
of Sir Walter placing his hand upon the pommel of her saddle, as they rode along.—Lady Norman was greatly displeased.—What had induced them thus to separate from the rest of the party?—Why were they thus alone together?—Why thus needlessly familiar?—What would any one think who saw them, as *she* did, in this unseemly attitude?—Nothing could be more unwarrantable,—nothing more indicative of——*Of what?* Alas! poor bewildered woman, she had lost all check upon the progress of her fears. In a brother and sister, the incident was perfectly natural and blameless. The young people were in fact talking of *her*; praising their mother as she deserved to be praised, and concerting schemes for her future happiness and comfort!—

END OF VOL. II.





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